

6-2021

## THE LATINO ACHIEVEMENT GAP: THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF LATINO STUDENTS

Sandra Gonzalez-Adamski  
*National-Louis University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss>



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), and the [Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Gonzalez-Adamski, Sandra, "THE LATINO ACHIEVEMENT GAP: THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF LATINO STUDENTS" (2021). *Dissertations*. 605.  
<https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss/605>

This Dissertation - Public Access is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons@NLU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@NLU. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@nl.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@nl.edu).

THE LATINO ACHIEVEMENT GAP: THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN  
THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF LATINO STUDENTS

Sandra Gonzalez-Adamski

Curriculum, Advocacy, and Policy

Doctor of Education

In the National College of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

National College of Education

National Louis University

June 2021

THE LATINO ACHIEVEMENT GAP:  
THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF LATINO STUDENTS

Sandra Gonzalez-Adamski

Doctoral Program in Teaching and Learning

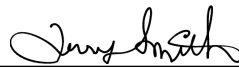
Curriculum, Advocacy, and Policy

National College of Education

Approved:



Chair, Dissertation Committee



Chair, Doctoral Program



Member, Dissertation Committee



Dean, National College of Education



Dean's Representative

June 23, 2021

Date Approved

## Abstract

Understanding that the academic achievement of Latino students continues to lag behind their White peers, this study explored the role of the teacher in the success or failure of Latino school-age children. The methodology utilized for this research was qualitative. I used a narrative approach to discuss the thoughts, opinions, and insights of the six teachers interviewed for this study. The in-depth conversations with the participants suggested differences in how Latino and White teachers view their Latino students. Most of the White teachers suggested that academic achievement can be reached through explicit vocabulary instruction, reading a wide variety of books, and holding students to higher standards. In contrast, the Latino teachers suggested that teachers and school districts need to honor bilingualism and provide a welcoming environment in order for Latino students to reach academic achievement. Overall, White teachers placed a higher value on cognitive intelligence, while Latino teachers placed a higher value on social intelligence. The White and Latino teachers that participated in this study had different perceptions on who is to be blamed for the failure of Latino students. When Latino students do not achieve academic success, some of the White participants suggested that this is because the Latino parents are not involved in their children's schooling and do not read to their children, but the Latino teachers suggested that Latino students do not succeed in school because they do not feel valued and that their humble personalities do not fit the White teacher's perspective of an independent learner. The individualistic view of educational success is quite different from the collectivistic viewpoint of success. White teachers who generally fall into the individualistic perspective described successful students as being self-reliant and independent, while the

Latino teachers who generally fall into the collectivistic perspective described successful students as being interdependent and preferring to work in cooperative groups. As school districts continue to have conversations about closing the achievement gap between minority students and White students and continue to supply teachers with new curricula and the latest assessment tools to keep track of student growth, districts must not fail to provide teachers with teacher professional development about culturally and linguistically diverse students. In the end, the ones who suffer from this neglect are the students. It is my belief that many teachers would be eager to learn more about working with Latino students and leveraging their students' culture to create a more educated student body.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my dissertation committee for helping me through this journey. Without their academic insights, support, and guidance, I would have had a much harder time completing this research. I would also like to acknowledge my friend Rina Kassem for always taking my phone calls and helping me sort through confusing academic research. Next, I would like to thank my husband, Max Adamski, for his unwavering support throughout the writing process. Max was there for me when I needed a shoulder to cry on, and when I needed to take a break, he was always willing to take a walk with me. Finally, I want to thank my three sons: Blake, Bryce, and Brock Conrad. They were my cheerleaders at every step, from the beginning when I was taking doctoral classes in the evenings and they had to make their own dinner, to the end when I was too caught up in the writing process to take their phone calls. Their consistent support gave me the strength to power through and finish.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Brigido and Aurelia Gonzalez, who immigrated to the United States of America to ensure a brighter future for their children. I only wish they were still on earth to feel the gratitude that I have for all their sacrifices.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Problem Statement .....	5
Purpose Statement.....	5
Definition of Terms.....	6
Historical Background .....	8
Significance of the Study .....	13
Research Questions .....	17
Scope.....	17
Roadmap .....	18
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	19
Historical Educational Inequities .....	19
Theoretical Frameworks .....	23
Critical Theory .....	23
Critical Race Theory .....	26
Latino Critical Race Theory.....	29
Deficit Theory .....	33
Blaming the Victim.....	37
Oppression .....	37
Pseudoscience .....	38
Educability and Heterodoxy .....	38
The Coleman Report .....	39
The Genetic Pathology Model .....	40



Cultural and Accumulated Environmental Deficit Models .....	45
Teacher Perceptions of Latino Students .....	48
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN .....	59
Introduction.....	59
Research Methodology .....	60
Narrative Approach.....	62
Research Site.....	63
Participants.....	66
Data Collection Tools .....	66
Interview Questions .....	68
Ethical Consideration.....	69
Researcher’s Role .....	70
Analysis and Synthesis of Data.....	71
Validity and Trustworthiness/Positionality.....	71
Summary of Methodology .....	72
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS .....	73
Dissertation Purpose Statement .....	73
Participant Demographics.....	76
Study Participants .....	79
Participant I: Linda .....	79
Participant II: Jose.....	81
Participant III: Barbara .....	83
Participant IV: Dela .....	85
Participant V: Carole.....	87
Participant VI: Maria .....	88

Participants' Perspectives .....	91
What Makes Latino Students Academically Successful? .....	91
What Gets in the Way of Latino Students' Academic Success? .....	101
What Can Latino Students Do to Improve Their Academic Success? .....	114
What Can Teachers Do to Improve the Academic Success of Latino Students? .....	122
What Can Schools Do to Improve the Academic Success of Latino Students? .....	133
When Thinking of Society as a Whole, What Biases Toward Latino Students Have You Heard of? .....	158
What Biases Against Latino Students Do You Think Need to Change in Order to Improve.....	167
Their Academic Outcomes?.....	167
Analysis Summary .....	175
CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETATION AND FINDINGS .....	176
Introduction.....	176
Interpretation of Data .....	176
Emerging Themes .....	177
Triangulation of the Dissertation Findings with the Literature .....	188
Theme I: Self-Efficacy.....	188
Theme II: Academic Achievements.....	191
Theme III: Student Support .....	195
Theme IV: Negative Perceptions .....	199
Study Findings .....	203
Research Questions Answered.....	205
Validity and Trustworthiness of the Findings.....	210
Limitations of this Study.....	211
Recommendations for Future Research .....	212

Implications of this Study .....	213
Personal Experience/Reflection .....	215
Summary and Final Insights .....	218
REFERENCES .....	220

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Characteristics of Sympathetic and Empathetic Teachers .....	54
Table 2. School Demographics .....	65
Table 3. Participant Teacher Demographics .....	74
Table 4. Participants' School Demographics .....	75
Table 5. Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question .....	100
Table 6. Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question .....	113
Table 7. Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question .....	122
Table 8. Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question .....	132
Table 9. Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question .....	149
Table 10. Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question .....	157
Table 11. Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question .....	166
Table 12. Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question .....	174

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Actual and Projected Numbers for Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Race/Ethnicity: Fall 2001 Through 2026 .....	16
Figure 2. What Makes Latino Students Academically Successful? .....	99
Figure 3. What Gets in the Way of Latino Student Academic Success? .....	112
Figure 4. What Can Latino Students Do to Improve Their Academic Success? .....	121
Figure 5. What Can Teachers Do to Improve Their Academic Success? .....	131
Figure 6. What Can Schools Do to Improve the Academic Success of Latino Students? .....	148
Figure 7. Lack of Understanding of the Latino Culture .....	156
Figure 8. Specific Biases About Latino Students .....	164
Figure 9. Biases About Latinos in General .....	165
Figure 10. Biases About Latino Students That Need to Change .....	173
Figure 11. Self-Efficacy Nature vs. Nurture .....	181
Figure 12. Academic Achievement: Instruction and Feeling Valued .....	183
Figure 13. Student Support: School Support and Parental Support .....	185
Figure 14. Negative Perceptions: General Biases Towards Latinos and Specific Biases Toward Latino Students .....	187

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In terms of academic achievement, Latino students continue to underperform in comparison to their White peers. In comparing White fourth-grade students to Hispanic fourth-grade students in reading, 47% of White children are at or above proficiency, while only 23% of Hispanic students are at or above proficiency. In the area of math, this gap continues, as 51% of White students are at or above proficiency and only 26% of Hispanic students are at or above proficiency (Nation's Report Card, 2019).

Over my 20 years in the field of education, during which time I have worked as a bilingual teacher, a university adjunct professor, and a school administrator, I have heard teachers talk about this issue in their classrooms, at professional development workshops, in graduate classes, and even in the teacher's lounge. These statistics make me wonder whether anything has changed for Latino students since I attended elementary school in the 1970s as a bilingual student and then worked as a bilingual teacher in the 2000s.

After reviewing data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), I have found that although racial/ethnic score gaps have narrowed, White students continued to score 21 or more points higher on average than Black and Hispanic students. In 2012, the gaps between White, Black, and Hispanic students narrowed in comparison to the gaps in the 1970s. The average score for Black students was then 36 points higher in 2012 than in 1971 (206–170) and the score for White students was 15 points higher (229–214). The average score for Hispanic students increased 25 points from 1975, and the score for White students increased 12 points. In 1975, when I was in elementary school, Hispanic children received an average scale

score in reading of 183 out of 300, while their White peers received an average scale score of 217 out of 300. Based on these results, it is important to determine whether anything has changed in the past 35 years since the government began collecting reading and math data based on ethnicity. In 2012, the average scaled score in reading for Hispanic children was 208, while the average reading scale score for White children was 229 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Although the reading achievement gap is narrowing, it is important to explore why it has not closed altogether.

Another way to evaluate the achievement gap between White and Hispanic students is to review high school dropout rates. Once again, the dropout rate has narrowed considerably from the 1990s to 2013; however, the gap still exists. For example, based on findings from 1990, nearly 35% of Hispanic students were classified as dropouts, while only 9% of White students were classified as the same. By 2013, the dropout rate for all race/ethnicity groups had reduced. The percentage of the Hispanic student dropout rate in 2013 was 12%, while the White dropout rate was reduced to 5% (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

In states such as California, the dropout rate is even more alarming. According to a 2005 Harvard University report on California youth, only 60% of Latino/a and 57% of African American students graduated with their high school class in 2002 as compared to 84% of Asian American students (Ochoa, 2007). In considering this relatively low level of educational attainment of Latino/a students in conjunction with the limited employment opportunities, the situation becomes alarming. From the beginning of the 20th century until the time of writing this paper, in the globalized economy, the

opportunities for social and economic advancement for people without a high school diploma have become severely limited (Ochoa, 2007). As Vazquez stated,

The persisting educational inequalities, especially with today's economic structure, have major implications for individuals, families, and communities. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that people twenty-one to sixty-four years of age who do not have a high school diploma have median incomes of about \$21,000 per year. In comparison, college graduates of the same age group earn over twice as much: about \$43,000 per year. (as cited in Ochoa, 2007, p. 26)

Ochoa further summarized the outcome of such educational inequality by stating that, "Over a lifetime of working for forty years, this wage gap translates into an \$880,000 difference, shaping life chances, opportunities for homeownership, and funding for children's college education" (Ochoa, 2007, p. 26).

In reviewing this data, it is clear that there are still many disparities in achievement between White and Hispanic students, as there were during my education. I would like to compare my history as a Latina in the American school system to see if there is a connection between my history of being in school and those of Latino kids in school today.

As a young child, I knew that I was not able to read the same books that my White classmates were able to read. I knew that I was placed in the lower reading groups; as I did not possess the knowledge or understanding about how languages are learned, nor that English was my second language and that it would take 5 to 7 years to reach grade-level proficiency (Baker, 2011, p. 175), I simply accepted the fact that I was unintelligent, a slow reader, and that spelling was always going to be a challenge for me.



My teachers reinforced this deficit belief. I can remember being in fifth grade and walking up to my teacher's desk for her to proofread the paragraph I had just written. The sharp sting of her comments still hurts: "Sandra, how many times do I have to tell you that the word 'they' is not spelled with an 'a'?" I froze, and I wanted to melt into the floor so no one would see that I did not know how to spell the word "they." We all have memories that haunt us into adulthood; however, I must confess that having survived that embarrassment forced me to memorize the correct spelling of this word.

By the time I was in middle school, I was reading better and able to spell better, but I still found myself in the lowest classes available. In the 1970s, schools were allowed to group students by ability and assign each section a name that clearly identified which sections had the smart kids and which sections had the others. In the seventh grade, my section was called 7-6. The smart students were in 7-1, while the lowest of the lowest were in 7-7. I felt better knowing that at least I was not at rock bottom.

Almost 40 years since I was in grammar school, Latino children are still lagging behind their White peers. This issue has not changed much since I was a child. The negative emotions that I felt as a young Latina student in the 1970s are still being felt by young Latino students today. Not long ago I was teaching a bilingual fourth-grade class in a predominantly Latino school district. The other fourth-grade teacher in my building, which I will call Andy, was Anglo, and most of her students were also Anglo (i.e., non-Spanish speaking). One day, Andy told me that my Latino students kept peeking into her class while she was teaching. Apparently, this bothered Andy and her Anglo students as well. She proceeded to tell me that she explained to her Anglo students that the Latino students were probably peeking in because they felt jealous that they were not in her

class, with her assumption being that if those in a bilingual classroom are perceived as being valued less than the children in the Anglo classroom. The astonishing reality with her statement is that she truly believed that her students were somehow better than my Latino students, who were still in a bilingual classroom. I share this story because it may explain the subtle bias that some teachers hold toward Latino students. I can only wonder what she truly felt about Latino students if she could not recognize that her comments to me were biased.

### **Problem Statement**

With the knowledge that Latino students are lagging behind their White peers, I sought to explore the role of the teacher in the success or failure of Latino students. In this study, I focused on teachers' perception of Latino students. I aimed to identify the attitudes, perceptions, and expectations that teachers hold toward their Latino students, as well as how they see their students and their students' culture. Additionally, I also examine how the cultural background of students is considered by teachers as they create lesson plans and interact with their Latino students.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate why Latino students are still lagging behind their White peers, and within that context, to explore how teachers perceive Latino students and whether these perceptions impact Latino students' learning. I also focused on one of the many issues that may or may not affect the academic success of Latino students—most notably, how teachers perceive Latino students in the classroom. In this study, my purpose was to explore teachers' perceptions and to examine to what degree teachers recognize their own biases of Latino students.

### Definition of Terms

*Achievement gap:* The disparity in the academic achievement of students, especially in minority groups and students of low-income status, is known as the achievement gap (Abramson, 2006). This gap, as defined by standardized tests, grade point averages, and dropout rates, has persisted for more than 40 years (Abramson, 2006).

*Attitude:* This is a feeling or emotion toward a fact or state, or a way of thinking that affects a person's behavior (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

*Beliefs:* Beliefs come from one's own experiences. In the realm of education, teachers' beliefs come from their own experiences as students in elementary, from their personal experiences with family, friends, and society, and—to some extent—from their teacher preparation program (Jones & Fuller, 2003, p. 20).

*Bias:* In the current research, biased-based beliefs in disproportionate school districts demonstrate color blindness, racial discomfort, and deficit thinking as interacting with practitioner self-efficacy (Fergus, 2017).

*Discrimination:* Discrimination in education occurs when a person or entity takes unfair action or inaction against people who belong to certain categories in enjoying their full right to educational opportunities. This is considered a civil rights violation. Education discrimination can be based on age, disability, gender, national origin, race, or religion. Typically, discriminatory action is perpetrated by teachers, administrators, or by other students (Findlaw, 2021).

*Ethnicity:* Ethnicity refers to the shared cultural practices that span across generations and are associated with both shared and distributed geographical space (Helms & Talleyrand, as cited in Paris et al., 2017).

*Latino/Hispanic:* Although some have definite and strong preferences for the term Latino and Hispanic, I have decided to use these terms interchangeably to refer to people of Latin American and Caribbean Spanish-speaking heritage (Nieto & Bode, 2008). I prefer the term Latino, but Hispanic is more widespread and well-known. Depending on the sources I have cited in this paper, I will use the term reflected in each citation. In all other cases, I will use the term Latino. Nieto and Bode explained that unlike the terms European, African, Latin American, or Asian, Hispanic does not refer to a particular continent or country. For example, there is not a continent named Hispania (Nieto & Bode, 2008). The term Latino has the disadvantage, however, of having a sexist connotation when used to refer to both males and females together. The word Latino refers to males, while the word Latina refers to females; however, when speaking about both males and females together, the correct usage of the word defaults to male. Today the term, Latinx, has replaced, Latino and Latina due to its inclusive properties. Latinx describes a person of Latin American origin or descent used as a gender-neutral or nonbinary alternative to Latino or Latina. When I began my research, the term Latinx was not widely used. I only began reading about it near the end of my dissertation. Because the term Latinx evolved after much of this research was already completed, I decided not to use this term when referring to Spanish-speaking people.

*Race:* Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines race as the category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits. The concept of race has received a great deal of

criticism because, in a biological sense, race does not exist at all. The differences that do exist are primarily social; thus, it is now generally accepted that the very concept of race is a social construct, meaning that one's race is socially and biologically determined (Nieto & Bode, 2008). Other than gender, there is no biological basis for distinguishing among human groups along the lines of the race (Omi & Winant, 1994).

*Racism:* Racism and other forms of discrimination are based on assumptions that one ethnic group, class, gender, or language is superior to all others (Nieto & Bode, 2008). It is a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race.

*White people:* White people, as the majority in U.S. society, seldom think of themselves as ethnic. Therefore, they tend to reserve this term for other, more easily identifiable groups (Nieto & Bode, 2008). Other authors, such as Trucios-Haynes (2000) and Enid (2000), have questioned why we view White as the norm. For the purposes of this research, the term includes all others who do not fit the characteristics of Latino/Hispanic.

### **Historical Background**

At the time of this dissertation's publishing (2021), I am the Director of Dual Language and English Language Learners at a preschool through eighth-grade school in the near western suburbs of Chicago. I still hear teachers in my district negatively describing the academic potential of Latino students. Earlier this year, a general education teacher asked me, "What can I do with these students who come to school speaking garbage English and garbage Spanish?" The fact that teachers are unable to see the value of speaking two languages—regardless of their proficiency—leads me to

question where these types of beliefs originated. Why do some educators continue to hold lower expectations for their Latino students? Could there be a link between teachers' expectations of minority students and their actual success in schools? What are the variables that determine whether minority students succeed in schools?

The public seems to assume that this gap is caused by the deficiencies that minorities experience in their daily lives (Valencia, 1997). Still others believe that their lack of success has more to do with their genetics (Tatum, 2007). Somehow, at this point in society, it has become widely accepted to blame the victims themselves (Valencia, 1997).

Where do these notions come from? Why do they continue to persist today? To begin with, one needs to examine a wealth of variables that include such issues as the history of education for minority students in the United States. It could be that teachers are unaware of why many in society still believe that people of color are incapable of performing at higher academic levels in comparison to their White peers (Hill & Torres, 2010). I believe that by investigating how Latinos have been educated throughout the history of the United States, one can gain a better understanding of why they continue to perform below their White peers. Several historical factors may have contributed to the disparities in academic achievement between Hispanic and White students. For example, Tatum (2007) made the following assertion:

We must always begin by acknowledging the social and historical context in which we operate. That context shapes how we think and act in powerful ways. One important dimension of that context is the fact that American schools were never designed to educate everyone. (p. 40)

When the Constitution was written, only White males were allowed to vote. White women were not allowed to vote until 1920. During this same time period, the constitution of the United States defined African slaves as being three fifths of a person. They did not have the right to be citizens, and it was illegal to educate them in some states. This ideology leads to another equally troubling notion about education. Historically, schools have been structures used to identify who has the ability to be educated and who does not. This is also known as ability grouping. It could be said that this notion persists because the notions of intelligence are firmly embedded in society and our educational systems. The link between intelligence and minority groups can be traced back to when the French psychologist Alfred Binet designed the first IQ test in 1905. Although this test was only designed to identify children who would today be classified as “mildly mentally retarded,” it was used in a completely different manner (Tatum, 2007, p. 42).

By the time Henry Herbert Goddard translated Binet's test into English, educators were already using it to identify what he called “high-grade defectives” or “morons” (Tatum, 2007, p. 44). In Goddard’s mind, these people were a menace to society because they threatened to weaken the gene pool of American intelligence. Goddard clearly wanted to separate these children from all others and prevent them from reproducing in order to keep society free of the “feeble-minded.” Although Goddard, who was a supporter of eugenics, brought the Binet test to America, it was Lewis Terman—also a supporter of eugenics, and Stanford University professor and psychologist—who incorporated it into American schools. After revising the test and simplifying the results to a simple score, or IQ score, Terman established the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale.

Terman (as cited in Tatum, 2007), who was an advocate of Eugenics, expressed his view on this subject in his widely read 1916 textbook, *The Measurement of Intelligence*.

Terman wrote:

Among laboring men and servant girls, there are thousands like them. They are the world's "hewers of wood and drawers of water." And yet, as far as intelligence is concerned, the tests have told the truth... No amount of school instruction will ever make them intelligent voters or capable citizens in the true sense of the word... the fact that one meets this type with such frequency among Indians, Mexicans, and Negroes suggests, quite forcibly, that the whole question of racial differences in mental traits will have to be taken up anew and by experimental methods... Children of this group should be segregated in special classes and be given instruction, which is concrete and practical. They cannot master abstraction, but they can often be made efficient workers, able to look out for themselves. There is no possibility at present of convincing society that they should be allowed to reproduce, however, from a eugenic point of view, they constitute a grave problem because of their unusually prolific breeding. (Tatum, 2007, p. 46)

By the late 1700s, it was noted that Blacks that were educated by missionary schools had the capabilities to learn. This threatened the main argument used to justify slavery. As these implausible theories about the intelligence of non-Caucasian people increased, the lives of Mexican Americans were not lost to the same unjustifiable ignorance. Spring and Spring (2005) explained this reality as thus:

The educational treatment of Mexican-Americans reflected the racial attitudes of Anglo-Americans toward Mexican-Americans who generally were of Native



American and Spanish ancestry. Popular Anglo-American writers in the nineteenth century argued that the mixture of Spanish conquerors and Native Americans resulted in "wretched hybrids" and mongrels that were in many respects actually inferior to the inferior race itself. (p. 168)

As far back as 1897, Texas courts declared Mexican Americans as "non-White" by highlighting the established idea that Mexican American children of the southwest were denied the same education as their White peers (Spring & Spring, 2005, p. 169). According to the Naturalization Act of 1790, only "Whites" could be classified as naturalized citizens. In 1946, a 9-year-old little girl named Sylvia Mendez was denied admittance into a "Whites-only" school in California. This denial fueled her father's determination to challenge these discriminatory practices. Sylvia's father, Gonzalo Mendez, along with his civil rights attorney, David Marcus, took four Los Angeles area school districts to court and won a class-action lawsuit. The 2-week trial was remarkable because the Mendez's attorney took the unusual approach of presenting social science evidence to support his argument that segregation results in feelings of inferiority among Mexican American children, which could undermine their ability to be productive Americans. The U.S. District Court Judge Paul J. McCormick agreed with the plaintiffs, ordering that the school district cease their "discriminatory practices against the pupils of Mexican descent in the public schools." In his decision, Judge McCormick wrote,

The equal protection of the laws pertaining to the public school system in California is not provided by furnishing in separate schools the same technical facilities, textbooks, and courses of instruction to children of Mexican ancestry that are available to the other public-school children, regardless of their ancestry.

A paramount requisite in the American system of public education is social equality. It must be open to all children by unified school association, regardless of lineage. (Spring & Spring, 2005, p. 420)

Later, the school district appealed the case to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit of California. The court of appeals affirmed the original decision; 2 months later, California governor Earl Warren signed a bill ending school segregation in California.

### **Significance of the Study**

The United States of America is a democratic country. According to its most common declared rhetoric, every student counts, meaning that no child or group of children can be left out. In his first speech to a Joint Session of Congress in February 2009, President Obama stated, “In a global economy where the most valuable skills you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity, it is a prerequisite.” In my opinion, if we want an educated society, there is a need to be fair and ensure that everything possible is being done to eliminate stereotypes and bias towards Latino students. The role of the teacher in accomplishing such hopes and dreams is paramount. Educators are the ones who can support, guide, and encourage Latino learners to achieve successful educational career.

Today, I often witness teachers’ inability to see cultural differences. I see teachers who want to treat all their students equally, which is commendable, but this attitude means that they fail to recognize cultural differences. For example, I remember one teacher—Ms. Smith—who complained to me that she was losing patience with her second-grade Latino students who insisted on calling her “maestra.” She lamented that she had already told them many times to call her Ms. Smith, but they refused. So, I took

this opportunity to explain to her exactly what was happening. To begin with, in most Latin American countries, teachers are highly regarded and are often called by their title, “maestra.” I continued with the example of the term “doctor” in the United States. For example, when addressing one’s doctor, they are not referred to as Mr. Smith, but as “doctor.” I explained that by calling her “maestra,” her students were actually using a more respectful term than Ms. Smith. After this explanation, her opinion about her students changed; however, this incident made me wonder what would have happened if I had not been there to explain this to her. Would she have continued to be frustrated with her students? Would she ultimately lose her patience and yell at the students who continued calling her maestra? Moreover, I began to worry about her students, as well as all the others who are experiencing this same situation. Would she harbor resentment toward her students? Would she think less of them and, in turn, begin to view them in a negative light? Would this incident cloud her perception of Latino students? I am glad that I was able to help this teacher by highlighting such an important cultural difference.

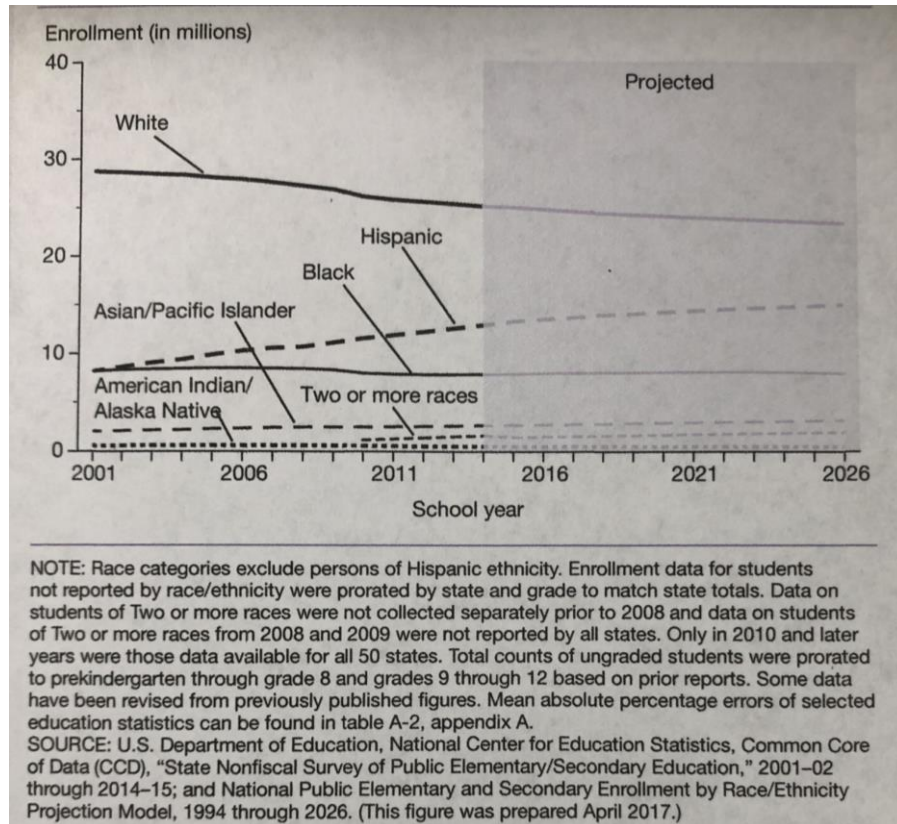
As educators, we should be concerned about the fact that we are leaving a great majority of our students behind. More than 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* mandated equal access to education to all students, I believe the current achievement gap should have been closed by now. This study is significant due to the critical need for an educated society in America. In order for the United States to maintain its status as a world leader, there is a need to ensure that all students are reaching their highest potential in school. Educators need to provide an accessible and equitable education to all. This is important because, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), Hispanics are the fastest-growing segment of the United States population. The Hispanic population

increased by about 58% from 22 million in 1990 to 35 million in 2000. In 2014, the National Center for Educational Statistics estimated that the percentage of students from ethnic minority groups made up more than 50% of the students in prekindergarten through 12th grade in public schools. This is an increase of from 40% in 2001 (Delgado, 2014). With the addition of so many new students, U.S. educators cannot afford to continue to ignore the achievement gap. Another important note to make is that of the millions of immigrants entering the United States, documented or undocumented, less than 10% are from Europe. Most come from Mexico, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Central America (Camarota, as cited in Bernal & Aleman, 2017).

Figure 1 below, from the U.S. Department of Education illustrates that enrollment in U.S. public schools for Hispanic students will increase 17% from 2014 to 2026. It will decrease 6% for White students and 6%, for Black students. With this increase of 17%, it is paramount to ensure that Latino students are not being left behind.

**Figure 1**

*Actual and Projected Numbers for Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, By Race/Ethnicity: Fall 2001 Through 2026*



As far back as the early 1900s, the notion of an educated society was becoming evident with the writing of John Dewey. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey wrote:

It is the office of the school environment to balance the various elements in the social environment, and to see to it that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born, and to come into living contact with a broader environment. (p. 18)

The underachievement of Latino students in America cannot be continued to be ignored.

As Horace Mann stated in his *Twelfth Report to the Board of Education* (1848),

“education is the great equalizer”. Yet, 160 years after his death, equality for all has not been achieved. Tyrone C. Howard (2010) posited that current academic disparities across racial lines hold serious consequences for the future of the United States. If the current achievement gaps continue over the next several decades, an increased proportion of the nation’s citizens will be severely undereducated and ill-prepared to compete in the global economy. This potential reality would cause grave political, economic, and social consequences to the United States.

### **Research Questions**

In this study, the research questions were as follows:

1. How do teachers’ narratives about their attitudes toward Latino students conform to or resist a racialized understanding of student achievement?
2. How do teachers perceive their Latino students?

In the next chapter, I describe the historical inequalities that Latinos faced during the founding of our nation and the discriminatory practices children faced in schools at that time. I explain why I chose critical race theory as my theoretical framework. I further discuss how Latino critical theory was used to better interpret my investigation findings. The reader will also learn how the many aspects of deficit theory--such as blaming the victim, oppression, and pseudoscience—continue to permeate schools today.

### **Scope**

The scope for this study was the perceptions and beliefs of teachers who work with Latino students. Only teachers with at least 3 years of teaching experience were interviewed for this study. No students or school administrators participated in this study.

Teachers were selected from elementary, middle, and high schools surrounding a large midwestern metropolitan city. The focus was on the gathering real-life stories from teachers who have taught Latino students.

### **Roadmap**

In the following chapter, I review the relevant body of literature regarding Latino student achievement. I also discuss the historical educational inequalities experienced by Latinos and the value placed on education as stated by Horace Mann. I will explain how the use of critical theory led me to utilize the tenants of critical race theory, which enabled me to comfortably discuss Latino critical race theory. In Chapter Three, I present and justify the selected research methodology and design. In Chapter Four, I discuss the findings of the research. Lastly, in Chapter Five, I provide a conclusion of the study and suggestions for future research on this topic.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

In this chapter, I look at two areas that—from my perspective—have contributed to the low achievement rate of Latino students. The first section of this literature review focuses on larger structural, historical, and legal theories, and how these are linked to educational disparities on achievement. In the second section of the chapter, I evaluate the social perceptions of ability, stereotypes, and teacher perceptions. The last part of this chapter centers on the philosophical perspective that frame my educational lens. I begin with the Frankfurt School and its critical theory and then analyze the ideas of critical race theory (CRT) and its outgrowth, Latino critical race theory, otherwise known as LatCrit.

#### **Historical Educational Inequities**

One way to understand the gap between White and Latino students is to look back in history to the type of education afforded to Black and Brown children throughout the history of the United States. First, it is necessary to consider why public schools were created in the first place. According to Horace Mann (as cited in Tozer et al., 2013),

Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men- the balance wheel of the social machinery...It does better than disarm the poor of their hostilities toward the rich; it prevents being poor. (p. 71)

Despite this uplifting declaration, some believe that public schools were created to enable all citizens to protect their political power others believe that they were created to protect the powerful elite. In the Twelfth Annual Report, Horace Mann wrote in a section of his



report titled “Intellectual Education as a Means of Removing Poverty and Securing Abundance,”

Were public schools established to ensure the dominance of Protestant Anglo-American culture over Native Americans, Irish Americans, and African Americans? Or were public schools created to educate the whole population?

From Spring’s (2012) perspective, the answer is clear:

Violence and racism are a basic part of American history and of the history of the school. From colonial times to today, educators have preached equality of opportunity and good citizenship while engaging in acts of religious intolerance, racial segregation, cultural genocide, and discrimination against immigrants and nonwhites. (p. 5)

The United States has confronted each racially defined minority with a unique form of despotism and degradation. The examples are familiar: Native Americans faced genocide, Blacks were subjugated to racial slavery, Mexicans were invaded and colonized, and Asians faced exclusion (Omi & Winan, 1994). When the Constitution was written, only White males were allowed to vote (Tatum, 2007), whereas White women were not allowed to vote until 1920.

The educational treatment of Mexican Americans reflects the racial attitudes that Anglo-Americans held against Mexican Americans. Mexican Americans were generally of Native Americans and Spanish ancestry. At the time of the Anglo dominations over the Mexican people, the Spanish were not considered to be White and, therefore, were believed to be an inferior race (Spring & Spring, 2005). When the United States invaded

Mexico in 1840, then Secretary of State James Buchanan expressed his view that northern European/Anglo-Saxons were the superior racial group. If the northern European and Anglo-Saxon leaders believed they were the superior race, this left Mexicans to be considered a substandard racial mixture of the descendants of the inferior European group (i.e., the Spanish) and Native Americans.

The attitude of racial, religious, and cultural superiority provided motivation for the United States to take over Mexican land, fueled hostilities between the two countries throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and was reflected in the treatment of Mexicans who remained in California and the Southwest after the U.S. conquest. Segregated schools, housing, and discrimination in employment became the Mexican-American heritage. (Spring & Spring, 2005, p. 171)

Spring and Spring (2005) emphasized that as far back as 1897, the Texas courts declared Mexican Americans as “non-White,” with the established idea that Mexican American children of the southwest should be denied the same education as their White peers. How could this be possible? According to the Naturalization Act of 1790, only “Whites” were allowed to be classified as naturalized citizens. Therefore, if Mexican American school children were not seen as “White,” then the same educational laws could not apply to them. This was one more way of establishing nonadmittance of Mexican American children to “White” schools.

According to, Ochoa (2007), the historical educational inequalities of Latino students can also be seen in the manner in which Mexican Americans were treated in California in the early 1900s. Of all the Latinos and Latinas in California, Mexicans have

predominated both historically and numerically. Mexicans have experienced inequitable access to education and exclusionary school practices and ideologies. For example, Ochoa shined a light on presumed biological deficiencies, once accepted as a “scientific” truth, as expressed in the following excerpt from the Los Angeles assistant supervisor of the Compulsory Education Department in 1928:

Authorities on the Mexican mind agree that after the age of 12-14 educational and higher ambitions turn to the inclinations of sex impulse...The average (Mexican) boy and girl revert to the native instinct. (Gonzales, 1990, p. 37)

This official believed that Mexican teenagers were naturally inclined toward sex, rather than education. This leads them to also believe that they did not have the capacity to control their sexual urges. In agreement with Ochoa (2007), I believe that it is these types of beliefs that have shaped and have reinforced past and current school practices

Extending from the 1940s into the 21st century, the civil rights movement was a continuation of the culture wars initiated by English colonist when they invaded Native American lands in North America (Spring & Spring, 2005). In the early 20th century, believers in the racial superiority of Whites, particularly Whites from England and Germany, used standardized testing to provide validity to their views. African American, Native Americans and Hispanics protested the lack of educational opportunities and fought for entry into the American economic system. The actions of African American leaders led the way to the formation of other groups demanding equality of education and recognition of their culture in public schools. Mexican Americans continued their struggles against segregation and sought preservation of Mexican culture and the Spanish language in schools. By the 1960s, Puerto Ricans had joined Mexican Americans in

supporting bilingual education. As I continue my research in this area, I am confronted with the fact that even as I write this dissertation, many minority students are still being denied entry into top performing schools; today, this can be attributed to educational funding, school districting lines, and other factors outside of the scope of this investigation.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

### **Critical Theory**

My theoretical framework for this dissertation relies heavily on critical theory (CT). The origins of critical theory can be traced to the Frankfurt School during the turn of the 20th century. Here, intellectuals, academics, and political dissidents concerned themselves with the political, economic, and social conditions for social change. The German theorist and social scientist and one of the founding fathers of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer along with Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm and others, came together to explore what was left of society after the end of the great war. “An important source of inspiration for the project pursued collectively by members and collaborators of the institute was Marx’s Critique of Political Economy.”

A goal of the project was to transform this critique through a collaboration between philosophers, economists, and psychoanalysts into critical theory of society that would be adequate for the social and historical constellation that existed after the great war. (Wellmer, 2014, p. 705)

Max Horkheimer and his associates hoped for a proletarian revolution, but by the late 1930s, it was clear that this goal would not be achieved. One of the reasons that I am drawn to critical theory is because of its early tenants, those that were born at the Frankfurt School. The idea that humans should have the ability to critique those in power

and to question unequal policies is at the heart of my being. “What distinguishes a critical theory from traditional forms of social theory is that critical theory conceives of itself as past and parcel of a struggle for an association of liberated human beings, in which everybody would have an equal change of self-development” (p. 706). Those who embrace the critical literacy perspective most frequently pay respect to the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, whose 1973 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* remains the most creative and influential work in critical literacy. Freire worked to raise consciousness and eradicate oppression and the culture of domination through praxis in which critical pedagogy is enacted (Kim, 2016). In his highly influential article, “Culture and Rationality in Frankfurt School Thought,” Henry Giroux (1982) explained how academics at the Frankfurt School began to question all forms of subordination of the human consciousness. The Frankfurt School’s theorists stressed the importance of critical thinking by arguing against the suppression of subjectivity, consciousness, and culture in history. According to Giroux, the Frankfurt School draws much of their principles to the rationality of the Enlightenment which preceded it. Like the intellectuals of the Enlightenment movement, the Frankfurt scholars, challenged traditional religious views. The critical theorists argued that Positivism which they critiqued, supports the goal of developing forms of social inquiry patterned after the natural sciences and based on the methodological tenants of sense observation and qualification. According to the Frankfurt School, the outcome of positivist relationality and its technocratic view of science represented a threat to the notion of subjectivity and critical thinking. The Frankfurt School was more interested in the issues that lead to the facts. Critical theory is a multidisciplinary perspective that refocuses is on the issue of knowledge and the

distribution of power in educational communities working to maintain and improve their democratic institution and hopes (Tozer et al., 2013). Henry Giroux pointed out in *Theory and Resistance in Education* that literacy has the potential not only to liberate people but to make oppressed people believe that the dominant culture is correct in portraying them as “inferior and responsible for their location in the class structure” (as cited in Tozer et al., 2013, p. 271). I see this manifestation in the classroom. Some children believe that they are not smart enough to stay in school or to be successful in school. I remember hearing my students talk about the White kids in the classroom next door as being “the smart ones.” It is clear to see that some have internalized this belief.

Do people internalize what the dominant culture proposes? This leads me to reflect on what just happened in El Paso, Texas. A lone White shooter entered a Walmart and systematically began shooting down Mexican looking people. It is alleged that he wrote a manifesto stating that he wanted to eliminate the threat of immigrants taking over his home state of Texas. It is also alleged that he followed extreme White supremacist website that subscribe to the notion that any person who crosses the U.S.-Mexican border is a criminal. It is here that I make my connection to positivist theory and critical theory. A positivist theorist will look at the fact that a Mexican national crossed the border with his family in tow and therefore should not be surprised that he is arrested and separated from his children. With my critical theoretical lens, I look at this same situation and question, his reasoning for crossing the border. I will look at the economic implications of his home country and the absolute threat of gang violence in his home country before I lay blame on the victim himself. Critical theory is what I subscribe to and what I have always felt in my heart, even before I knew it had a name.

Critical theory suggests that we live in a power-laden context, and that we view society through a social justice lens (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Critical theorists are weary of notions of absolute truth and base their concerns on the historical inequalities produced by this rigid view of knowledge (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). According to Tozer et al. (2013), when applied in a school setting, CT is characterized by a willingness to call into question the whole social order and to place the concept of power relations at the center in discussing a problem.

Critical theory asks that we look at the relationship between a child and a school. Critical theory looks at the power relationship between a child's culture and the culture of the school. From this perspective many other approaches including feminism, queer theory and critical race theory have emerged. In this chapter, I provide a more in-depth explication of CRT and the many dimensions that were applied to the current research.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged from critical legal scholarship at the culmination of the Civil Rights Movement and evolved as a result of several key events, including boycotts of classes at law schools throughout the United States, a meeting of several influential critical race scholars, and the publication of a special edition of the *Civil Rights/Civil Liberties Law Review* (Taylor et al., 2009). The early origins of critical race theory sprang up in the 1970s as a number of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars realized that the heady advances of the civil rights era of the 1960s had stalled, and in many respects, were even being rolled back (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 4). Scholars began to realize that in order to combat the subtler forms of racism that were gaining ground, early writers, such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado, put

their minds to work and were later joined by fellow scholars in the summer of 1989 at their first workshop in Madison, Wisconsin.

Through their work, critical race scholars identified at least four tenets central to CRT: (a) although racism is a “normal fact of daily life in U.S. society” (Taylor et al., 2009, p. 4), it typically goes unnoticed by those who do not experience it; (b) in accordance with Bell’s theory of interest convergence, “Racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites” (Bell, 1980, p. 76); (c) the narratives of those who experience oppression can be instrumental in clarifying the nature of racism; and (d) instances of oppression can only be understood when they are situated within the appropriate historical context (Taylor et al., 2009). In accordance with these tenets, education scholars assert that racism is woven into the fabric of education in the United States (Solorzano & Yosse, 2001). Consequently, CRT in education works to “identify, analyze, and transform those aspects of education that maintain dominant and subordinate positions in and out of the classroom” (Solorzano & Yosse, 2001, p. 25). Many educators have used CRT to investigate a variety of phenomena, such as school-based microaggressions against parents and children of African American descent (Solorzano & Yosse, 2001) and the nature of race consciousness among White educators. Using CRT as a theoretical framework, in the current study, I examined what contributes to Latino success or failure and to what degree teachers recognize their own bias.

Other scholars, such as Octavio Villalpando (2004), have suggested that “Critical theory requires the examination of institutional policies, programs, and practices that interfere with Latino students’ rights and abilities to receive the best education. With



attention to an ethic of caring and social justice, students' services staff can work to undo the effects of racism on campuses" (p. 42). Critical race theory enables the analysis of patterns of racial exclusion and other forms of discrimination. While legally-sanctioned racial discrimination may no longer exist overtly, CRT can aid in the recognition of patterns and policies of racial inequality that continue to exist in more insidious and covert ways. By using the CRT lens, I hope to determine whether teachers of Latino students hold some of the misconceptions that exist about Latino students in America. It is important to point out that CRT is increasingly being adopted by education scholars to analyze the racialized barriers against people of color. Critical race theory helps expose the ways in which so-called race-neutral institutional policies and practices perpetuate racial or ethnic subordination. This framework emphasizes the importance of viewing practices within a proper historical and cultural context in order to better understand their relationship to race and racism (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) indicated that CRT proposes that White supremacy and racial power are maintained over time—and, in particular, that the law may play a role in this process. In addition, CRT researchers have investigated the possibility of transforming the relationship between law and racial power, and more broadly, pursue a project of achieving racial emancipation and anti-subordination. Today, critical race theory is taught at many law schools; it is spreading to other disciplines, and even to other countries. In the United Kingdom British scholars, particularly in the field of education, use critical race theory to understand inequality in the schools, high-stakes testing, and many other topics (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

The process of conducting the current research has allowed me to understand the historical inequities that Latino students have experienced since the inception of this country. From the inequitable access to education and exclusionary school practices of the early 1990s, to the use of the IQ Test as a barrier to education, and publication of deficit theories, I will continue to use critical race theory as my lens throughout this research.

### **Latino Critical Race Theory**

Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) is one of the many splinter groups of CRT. Latino critical race theory, as explained by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), calls attention to issues such as immigration, bilingual schooling, language rights, census categories for Hispanics and sanctuary for Latin American refugees. Many LatCrit scholars oppose the English only movement and “probable cause” laws that encourage police to stop and question foreign-looking people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 91). Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) stated that Latino critical race theory is similar to CRT. However, LatCrit is concerned with a progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino pan-ethnicity and addresses issues often ignored by critical race theorists such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (as cited in Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). LatCrit theory is conceived as an antiracism and antiessentialist project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teacher, and the academy with the community. LatCrit is supplementary and complementary to critical race theory. Moreover, these authors postulated that

Borrowing from the law, we argue that CRT and LatCrit theory challenge the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining

how educational theory and practices are used to subordinate and marginalize Chicana and Chicano students. (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 312)

Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) addressed five themes that form the basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of CRT and LatCrit framework in education. The first theme is the centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination. LatCrit scholars examine the issue of subordination in gender, and class discrimination. Second is the challenge to dominate ideology. CRT and LatCrit challenge deficit frameworks, colorblindness, power, and privilege. Third is the commitment to social justice. CRT and LatCrit theorist believe in empowering underrepresented minority groups. Fourth is the centrality of experiential knowledge. The framework recognizes that the experiential knowledge of students of color are legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education. The fifth and last perspective of CRT and LatCrit is the interdisciplinary perspective. CRT and LatCrit challenge ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analyses. It insists on analyzing race and racism in education by placing them in both an historic and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods.

According to Villalpando (2004), critical race theory and Latino critical theory are conceptual frameworks arising from legal studies that can help improve our understanding of issues related to social justice and racial inequality in society (Crenshaw et al., 1995). These frameworks enable researchers and practitioners to analyze patterns of racial exclusion and other forms of discrimination. CRT and LatCrit help scholars to recognize the patterns, practices, and policies of racial inequity that continue to exist in

more insidious and covert ways. CRT and LatCrit help expose the ways in which so-called race neutral institutional policies and practices perpetuate racial and ethnic subordinations (Villalpando, 2004).

Perez Huber (2010) described CRT and LatCrit as a method of examining the experiences unique to the Latino community, such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture. CRT in educational research unapologetically centers on the ways race, class, gender, sexuality, and other forms of oppression manifest in the educational experiences of people of color. In addition, Trucios-Haynes (2000) cited that the major issues of CRT also tie into the same issues of LatCrit and into the lived experience of Latinos in this country and around the world. LatCrit, to which I will now refer, begins to draw attention to how Latinos can fall into the seduction of Whiteness. Latinos/as, more than any others, are seduced by Whiteness because they are not Black; they are not even identified as a race—at least not officially.

Trucios-Haynes writes that Latinos must acknowledge and investigate the ways in which the dominant culture defines their group as non-White, White, or some other racial group that is outside of the race discourse, in order to suit its convenience, depending upon the interest that exists at a particular time. The author added that self-identification for many Latinas/os includes experiences not recognized within the dominant Black-White paradigm. For example, some Latinas/os possess a racial identity intertwined with their cultural identity (Trucios-Haynes, 2000). Those who perceive their racial identity as intertwined with their cultural identity, however, may recognize a broader concept of racial identity that the seemingly narrow racial categories in the United States under the Black-White paradigm. If Latinas/os had a broader understanding of racial identity, it

could lead to more inclusive racial discrimination remedies and a broad-based effort to combat subordination in U.S. society. Trucios-Haynes state that because Latinas/os are mostly perceived as non-White, their experiences often are rendered invisible.

The impact of indeterminate racial status among Latino people has led to discrimination against Latinos to be ignored. This occurs because the dominant Black-White paradigm only views discrimination issues that fall under these two categories. For instance, the classifications that predominantly impact Latinos are not viewed as discrimination against a racial group—and, therefore, are more easily justified, because it seemingly may focus on some “legitimate” reason for distinctions between Latinos and Whites, such as language ability. Discrimination based on language ability may be remedied under anti-discrimination law because it is not perceived as race-based (Trucios-Haynes, 2000).

In the following quotation, Trucios-Haynes (2000) described how the construct of non-White identities were placed on Latinos in the 1800s:

The non-White identity ascribed to Latinos has a long history in the United States. Starting in the 1800s, Mexican-Americans experienced residential segregation, while Mexican-American children received a segregated education in many parts of the Southwest both before and after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Mexican-Americans were also commonly referred to as an inferior race in the Southwest. Further, “Chicanos have been defined as alien to the mainstream white society, whose members viewed themselves as a superior European civilization in America. The history of this Non-White racial identity is evident from such racial practices as the lynching of Mexicans from the 1880s through the 1930s. The use

of the term “greaser” was used as a racial epithet, while there were also a number of warnings published in U.S. government publications regarding the inferiority of Latin Americans, who were ninety percent of Indian blood. (p. 6)

But there is still much more we can learn about how race and ethnicity play an important role in education. Even though the majority of teachers do not intentionally or overtly allow race or ethnicity to color their opinions about students, much of this happens subconsciously. Murrell (2007) explained that acts of racism in the present day are much more covert than they were in the Jim Crow era of discrimination or in the Civil Rights era. The work of Lewis (2003) is important because it documents the ways in which the undercurrent of color-conscious practices and discourse creates a toxic social and cultural climate for children of color. The inscription of generally low expectations for African American and Latino students, as well as other students of color in urban settings, is one unfortunate result of the color-blind ideology. It is not unrelated to ideologies of meritocracy and racial privilege.

Learning is enhanced when it occurs in contexts that are socially, culturally, cognitively, and linguistically familiar to the learner. In other words, learning achievement is improved for individuals who are participating meaningfully in a culturally familiar and supportive social environment. In order to further understand the complexities of teacher perceptions of student’s race in the classroom, a deeper understanding can be achieved by applying the lens of deficit theory.

### **Deficit Theory**

The word deficit suggests a shortage, a disadvantage, an impairment, or a handicap. The idea of viewing humans as having inherent deficits did not begin in the

1960s; it can be traced back to the time of Plato when he stated in *The Republic, Book III* (414A-415A) that all were created by God, but that some were molded with gold, others with silver, and yet others with iron and brass. This necessary lie would allow men to accept their place in society. Those woven with gold would be fit to rule, while those woven with brass and iron would be farmers and other craftsmen (Tozer et al., 2013). Later, during medieval times, the nobility was sanctioned by the authority of the church as having been ordained by God to rule over commoners.

Martha Menchaca (1993) discussed the early racist discourse and the roots of deficit thinking. When America was new and evolving into the country that it has become today, many minorities paid the price for its success. Early deficit thinking can be traced to the time of the Pilgrims and other early Europeans that settled in the Americas. At this time, biblical interpretations about race and culture were the only accepted discourse. The first Pilgrims were pious people and did not have any intention of hurting the Native Americans. Because British law did not recognize the Native Americans as landowners, however, they simply used the Pilgrims as servants and conduits for mercantile capitalism in North America. During this time period, the British believed that White people were God's people and any others were inferior. The British used the Bible as a way of controlling the beliefs of its people. If the Bible said that Native Americans were savages and needed to be educated away from paganism, then it would be easy to convince the masses that they were indeed doing them a favor.

Pilgrims and the succeeding White generations rationalized their economic interest by proselytizing the religious tenet that they were "God's Chosen People" (Menchaca, 1993). To them, it was clear that God had made the Anglo-Saxons a superior

race destined to own and govern America. Allegedly, God had also bestowed upon them the obligation to encourage European immigration in order to populate America with Christians (Valencia, 1997).

By the 1700s, scholars began to postulate that only Caucasians belonged to the human race. I understand how many of these notions could have been construed as evidence that non-Whites were either inferior to Whites or not human at all. In the late 1700s, Charles White claimed that “the smaller braincases of Non-Whites indicated they were of a different species from Caucasians” (Valencia, 1997, p.18). He cited that although Whites and non-Whites had some similarities, this was attributed to the fact that a previous common genus that produced various species. These types of ideas, although incorrect, have been handed down from generation to generation, and many still believe in their validity.

Valencia (1997) defined the deficit concept as thus: “Deficit thinking is tantamount to the process of ‘blaming the victim.’ It is a model founded on imputation, not documentation” (p. x). Valencia further explained that the origin of this brilliant two-word phrase is difficult to pin down. It appears, however, that the phrase was invented by a small cadre of scholars in the early 1960s that launched an assault on the notion that asserted the poor and people of color caused their own social, economic, and educational problems. Thus, the phrase appears to have its origin as a social construct stemming from the popular theories of the 1960s that touted similar phrases, such as culturally disadvantaged, cultural deprivation, and accumulated environmental deficits (Valencia, 1997).



As unbelievable as these words sound today, this was the widely held belief of many psychologists and educators of the time. This belief manifested itself in the school system and accounted for much of the separation between cultures. Tozer et al. (2013) have also written about deficit theories. They discussed genetic inferiority and cultural deficit theories which often conclude that society and the law should leave individuals alone to sink or swim according to their merit. These theories tend to embrace a particular view of the world as a middle-class, scientific worldview, a cultural orientation that Henry Giroux referred to as technocratic rationality. These theories fail to take into consideration the cultural and language background of all others.

Valencia (1997) described the many underlying topics that attribute to deficit thinking. Additionally, Delgado Bernal (2002) examined the evolution of deficit thinking in the context of education both in the academic discourse regarding what constitutes deficit thinking and the schooling practices that result from this social thought.

Conceptualizing the notion of deficit thinking can be attributed to many factors. Valencia (1997) highlighted the fact that “as our nation approaches the new century, the improvement of schooling for economically-disadvantaged racial/ethnic minority students presents one of the greatest challenges ever faced by educators and policymakers” (p. 17). Many minority students attend segregated and equitably-funded schools. These same students perform lower on standardized tests, drop out of high school in increasing numbers, and attend 4-year universities in low numbers. Although many hypotheses exist to explain minority student failure in schools, Delgado Bernal (2002) examined one of the most widely-known and historic theories—that of deficit thinking and defined deficit thinking.

At its core, the deficit thinking model is an endogenous theory, positing that the student fails in school does so because of internal deficit or deficiencies. Such deficits manifest in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior. After researching its history, it is clear that deficit thinking helped to shape the popular beliefs of minority students in years past, as well as the present.

### **Blaming the Victim**

Valencia (1997) explained deficit thinking by examining six characteristics of deficit thinking: (a) blaming the victim, (b) oppression, (c) pseudoscience, (d) temporal changes, (e) educability, and (f) heterodoxy. Commentary regarding the mentality of *blaming the victim* did not originate with Valencia. According to Valencia, one of the earliest commentaries on this mentality can be attributed to the writings of William Ryan (1976) and his book titled “Blaming the Victim,” wherein Ryan asserted that society is very willing to blame the victim without ever looking at what is causing the real problem. For example, Ryan maintained that programs of compensatory education are available to help inner-city children, yet the structural changes needed in schools remain ignored. Policymakers continue to develop programs to assist minorities as though minorities needed to be fixed. Healthcare continues to be provided for those unwilling to seek healthcare. All of these notions are based on the premise that minorities need to overcome their deficiencies.

### **Oppression**

The second characteristic of deficit thinking enumerated by Valencia (1997) is oppression. Oppression can be viewed as a way of keeping various minority groups down. In the 18th century, legislators passed a number of compulsory ignorance laws that

called for heavy fines to be imposed on any person who was found to be educating African slaves. These laws ensured that slaves were never going to be a threat to the Whites. Another way of oppressing minorities was by way of school segregation and high-stakes testing.

### **Pseudoscience**

Pseudoscience is the third characteristic of deficit thinking that Valencia (1997) brought to the fore. Those opposed to deficit thinking theories complain that this kind of thinking is pseudoscience. I believe there is wide agreement that proving a hypothesis is widely held as the ultimate proof of a theory. Hence, those opposed to deficit thinking believe that because this theory cannot be proven, then it must be false (Valencia, 1997). This assumption is weak and incomplete, however, because it fails to embrace other means of measurement. Not everything in life can be explained through the scientific method.

### **Educability and Heterodoxy**

The final two characteristics of deficit thinking include educability and heterodoxy. Each of these assumptions adds to the initial theory of blaming the victim. Some scholars like Blum (as cited in Valencia, 1997) believe that minorities cannot be educated because they are cognitively inferior and, therefore, do not warrant further education. I find it difficult to understand and accept some of these theories because I tend to view people with an open mind. I believe that we are all equal. When I read and write about these deficit theories, I feel personally assaulted and professionally appalled; hence, I am compelled to explore the history of deficit thinking in greater depth.

### **The Coleman Report**

To further explain the notion of deficit thinking, in 1966, James Coleman and his colleagues conducted an educational study on schools and inequality commissioned under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and sponsored by the United States Department of Education called the Equality of Educational Opportunity, otherwise known as “The Coleman Report.” The U.S. Office of Education commissioned James Colman to conduct a survey. This survey was conducted to investigate the lack of availability of equal educational opportunity for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin. Coleman’s team gathered data on 6,000,000 school children, 60,000 teachers and 4,000 schools across the United States:

Although it was profoundly influential in the national discussion about schools and inequity, the Coleman study was seriously flawed. According to Samuel Bowles and Henry Levin, for example, the statistical method used to analyze the data grossly underestimated the positive effects of schooling on student achievement. (Tozer et al., 2013, p. 361)

The findings of this report seem to invite the scientific investigation of unequal education achievement by looking for flaws in the children rather than in the schools or in society (p. 361). The Colman report was not the only study that suggested that deficiencies in children were to blame for unequal achievement among school children. In *On Quality of Education Opportunity*, Moynihan and Mosteller (as cited in Tozer et al., 2013), reinforce by adding that achievement problems faced by minority children rested not with the schools, but with the students and their cultural background. In an article entitled “Revisiting the Coleman Report: Deficit Ideologies and Federal

Compensatory Funding in Low-Income Latino Communities,” Oscar Jimenez-Castellanos (2012) argued that the Coleman Report helped give credence to contemporary deficit ideologies on education by proclaiming that schools do not make much of a difference in the educational outcome of students in poverty, including Latino students.

### **The Genetic Pathology Model**

The next area of deficit thinking that I investigate involves the genetic pathology model of deficit thinking. Valencia (1997) explained how inferiority was thought to be transmitted through the genetic code. This notion was widely believed and touted as imperially valid from as early as 1890 to as late as the 1930s. As this author explained,

The hereditarian notion of genetically-determined intelligence was firmly entrenched by the 1920s, as was the deficit thinking position that intellectual differences favoring Whites over certain ethnic minority groups; for example, Blacks, Mexican-Americans, was largely due to an innate basis. (Valencia, 1997, p. 41)

Nature versus nurture was a strong argument of this time. This notion of inherited genius can be traced to the 1870 book by Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences*. Galton posited that men of importance, such as military commanders and statesmen, were in these positions because of their inherited intelligence that was passed on by their parents. Galton failed to consider, however, that these people of privilege were in these positions of privilege not because of their intellect, but because they inherited these positions from their parents. The only thing they inherited from their parents was their position in society and their perceived status. It seems obvious that

believing that one is superior to another simply because of heredity is incorrect; yet, this was the prominent school of thought at this time. Contemporary scholars also used Darwin's ideas in order to promote their deficit thinking. For example, Valencia (1997) explained,

Social Darwinism was used to explain social stratification. Those groups of people who were wealthier, brighter, and moral, as compared to the poor, intellectually dull and immoral, were in such privileged positions because of their allegedly fitter genetic constitutions. (p. 45)

Once again, I question this notion of superiority. Who is to say what constitutes intelligence? The people in power have a vested interest in maintaining this notion of superiority in order to keep others in their place.

Eugenics was another way of using alleged science to keep certain groups of the population from procreating, thereby adding to the already dull gene pool that was thought to exist among non-Whites at this time. Galtonian eugenics and the study of growth—specifically, the relation of body size, intelligence test score, and social circumstances in children and adults—were widely promoted during the early 1900s.

According to Blum (as cited in Valencia, 1997), “Galton was a staunch advocate of eugenics, the belief that improvement in the human race could and should be encouraged through selective breeding” (p. 45). Most of Galton's theories were accepted by U.S. immigration agencies. In 1924, the Johnson-Lodge Immigration Act was passed. In a sense, this Act was used to limit the amount of southern and eastern Europeans to enter the United States. Those in power wanted to avoid the “mongrelization” of the Anglo-Saxon racial stock. It is no wonder that the Honorable Albert Johnson, the

Congressman who served as chairman of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization and co-author of the Immigration Act of 1924, was elected as Chairman of the Eugenics Research Association in 1923. He sought to maintain his position by enacting laws that keep others from questioning this position.

Eugenics played another role in maintaining deficit thinking among the policymakers of the early 20th century. The coerced sterilization of individuals who were seen as mentally ill or defective, socially deviant, or who engaged in criminal activities, was never questioned. In fact, it was the United States—not Nazi Germany—that became the first nation to enact and enforce laws in favor of sterilization in order to purify the race. This abhorrent behavior was seen as normal to most deficit theorists at the time. In addition, they found other ways to perpetuate their perceived superiority. Intelligence testing was growing in popularity within the U.S. Army. Naturally, intelligence testing moved from the realm of identifying superior soldiers to that of classifying children. In 1928, the intellectual performance of Mexican American school children was assessed in an attempt to identify the causes of retardation in Mexican American children. The study took place in a small public school system in Arizona. The intellectual performance of 197 White students and 117 Mexican American students was tested. The findings concluded that the median IQ was higher for the White students at almost all grade levels. After taking into account attendance and transience in order to determine why retardation was higher among this population, the conclusion was that Mexican American students scored lower due to their inferior genetic makeup. Sadly, other variables, such as language proficiency and socioeconomic status were never considered before these findings were made public. It is no wonder why some teachers today still hold deficit-

thinking beliefs when working with black or Latino students. Even though these biased findings were published nearly 85 years ago, it seems to me that they are still alive and still lie dormant in the subconscious of many teachers

Long after the heyday of eugenics in the United States, many in the field began to focus on cultural deficits instead of genetics and heredity in order to maintain the status quo of White superiority. Douglas E. Foley (as cited in Valencia, 1997) wrote about the newly-accepted model of deficit thinking that replaced the old model that used genetics to perpetuate deficit thinking. During the 1940s and 1950s, many researchers began to move away from racist and genetic pathology thinking. As Valencia (1997) stated, “As deficit theorists began searching for a more cultural explanation of the failure in school and life, many turned to the work of anthropologist Oscar Lewis and his culture of poverty theory” (p. 113). After that, deficit thinking took on a new face—that of poverty, which was now the new answer to deficit thinking. If it is no longer accepted that genetics determines intelligence, then there must be something else that is keeping non-Whites from being successful in life. In the 1950s and 1960s, theorists began to identify the variables contributing to and perpetuating poverty among minorities in the United States. It is unclear why other factors were never questions during this time, such as inadequate school funding and lack of employment opportunities. Oscar Lewis created a list of 70 traits that can be compressed into four categories, all of which contribute to poverty and deficit thinking. Within these categories, the following is a list of traits that paint the poor as being according to Lewis:

lazy, fatalistic, hedonistic, violent, and distrustful people living in common-law unions, as well as in dysfunctional, female-centered authoritarian families who are



chronically unemployed and rarely participate in local civic activities, vote, or trust the police and political leaders. (as cited in Valencia, 1997, p. 115)

These ideas were rooted in the minds of people in the late 1960s; hence, by the time I was in school, in the early 1970s, these same ideas were most likely viewed as facts. It is no wonder that my classmates in elementary and middle school made fun of my name and the way I looked; they were listening to what their parents believed to be fact. I heard this so often that I began to believe that Mexicans were inferior to Whites. I also fell into the trap that had me believing that Blacks were untrustworthy and inferior to Whites. The damage caused by these theories cannot be measured, although its sting is still felt today. Lewis (as cited in Valencia, 1997) was instrumental in keeping the notion of cultural deficits alive in the 1960s and 1970s by proposing the general view of working-class families and parents as highly nonverbal, impulsive, authoritarian, and dysfunctional. The theories that Lewis portrayed “provided policymakers with a much more accessible and dramatic popular image that the technical deficit studies of language, parenting, and cognitive development lack” (p. 117).

I still see much of this thinking taking place in the classrooms of many minority students. At times, I feel that some minority students—especially those enrolled in my district—need extra academic assistance because their parents tell me that they themselves never reached fourth or fifth grade in school in Mexico and cannot help their children with academics at home. It is very hard to separate what I believe to be true about minority students and what I perceive to be real about them.

For example, I do not want to assume that just because my students arrived from Mexico that he or she brings no value to my classroom. They may not be able to speak

English, but I know that this is not due to a lack of intelligence. I understand that the inability to speak English does not prove that they are intellectually inferior. I do firmly believe, however, that many teachers today still believe this to be true and may, in fact, expect less from their minority students. Is this a racist perception of minority students? It is at this precise moment that I begin to reflect on the words of Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode (2008) when they explained,

Racism is an excruciatingly difficult issue for many people. Given our nation's history of exclusion and discrimination, this is not surprising; however, it is only through a thorough exploration of discrimination based on race that we can understand the genesis, as well as the rationale, for a more inclusive framework for multicultural education that includes language, social class, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, religion, and other differences. (p. 5)

### **Cultural and Accumulated Environmental Deficit Models**

The last aspect of deficit thinking that I will examine in this paper concerns Cultural and Accumulated Environmental Deficit Models. Arthur Pearl (as cited in Valencia, 1997) explained how deficit thinking moved away from genetics, eugenics, and culture by moving to environmental issues. Pearl explained, "As genetic explanations became increasingly unpopular, or in today's jargon, politically incorrect, alternative explanations for persistent school failure and social reproduction were developed" (as cited in Valencia, 1997, p. 132). So, what were deficit theorists going to focus on next? Cultural deprivation was the next best thing to focus on. From the mid-1960s, proponents of deficit thinking began to document deficiencies in a minority culture. These harsh allegations point blame directly on the family. "The *cultural deprivation model*, also

known as the *cultural disadvantage* or *social pathology* model, singled out the family unit (rather than genes) as the transmitter of deficiencies” (Pearl, as cited in Valencia, 1997, p. 132). In the cultural deprivation model, Pearl described that although culture—or the lack thereof—was central to this model, the family was key to this deficit framework. The family unit—the mother, father and the home environment—was deemed to be the carrier of the pathology. The families of the poor were frequently depicted in very negative ways.

In my opinion, this idea of inferiority seems quite ridiculous, and yet I still experience this type of thinking in my school district. I hear teachers in the lunchroom talking about how terrible the home life of minority students must be. They assume that their students, who live in poverty, also suffer from uncaring parents, which could not be farther from the truth. When I speak to the parents of my students, I often learn about extended families living in one home and how sharing stories from the “old country” helps their children cope with living in a new environment. This was not the case in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, when theories of cultural and environmental deficit models were taking hold. Pearl described how the wealth of literature available described the culture of the poor. He summed it up as follows:

The inadequate father was often described as an abusive or neglectful parent who frequently engaged in the physical punishment of his children, abused substances, was a poor provider, and was also sexually promiscuous. Likewise, the mother was characterized as equally inadequate, being described as a poor teacher of her children as she did not read to her children, was unable to communicate the value of education and importance of high academic achievement to her children, and

was sporadic with her affection of love, etc. (Pearl, as cited in Valencia, 1997, p. 134)

After reading and rereading these negative attributes, I find it amazing that poor people were even capable of surviving. These characteristics seem to portray the poor as inadequate at every level. This type of deficit thinking seemed to take hold quite deeply in society, and especially in education. Teachers with great hearts were drawn to the field of education in order to help these poorly inadequate parents produce educated children. While at the same time, other teachers used the excuse of deficit thinking in order to justify their lack of motivation when challenged with minority students in the classroom. Not too long ago, I was reminded of this type of deficit thinking in my own school. When I began my career in a predominantly Mexican American school district in the suburbs of Chicago, I worked with a veteran teacher who informed me that she was not going to change her way of teaching just because her students could not speak sufficient English. She told me that she simply sat them in the back rows and let them sink or swim. I was shocked and appalled by her comments at the time, and still am today.

In summary, the roots of deficit thinking can be traced the new European arrivals of the 1600s. Although the Pilgrims did not promote these notions, their financial backer did. The land was justifiably taken away from Native Americans simply by quoting the bible. When early researchers began to see a change in immigration to America from Southern and Eastern Europe, Eugenics was brought in to once again justify the sterilization of the unwanted and the feeble-minded. When blaming genetics became politically incorrect, theorists turned to culture as the culprit for deficiencies among the poor. It is clear that deficit thinking has had a lasting hold on American society for a great

many years, and I do not predict that it will go away any time soon. What I do see, however, is a failure to shed light on other issues, such as the persistent unequal treatment of minorities in the United States, as well as institutionalized biases toward them.

### **Teacher Perceptions of Latino Students**

Having cited a variety of deficit thinking notions, it is not far-reaching to believe that some of these notions have been internalized by teachers. I believe that the perception that teachers have about their students can affect how they teach, communicate, and inspire students. I have seen numerous occasions where teachers have spent quality time tutoring their students during lunch, after school, and even before school, while I have also seen teachers advocate for their students in meetings and during their plan periods. Conversely, I have seen teachers dismiss—or even ignore—students. With this wide array of attitudes ranging from positive to negative, I question what might be happening here. I have worked my entire educational career with Latino students; thus, all of my teacher-student experiences have been with Latino students. With this in mind, I decided to see what the research has uncovered about teacher perceptions of minority students. I specifically examined teachers' perceptions of Latino students.

In their paper, “Who Believes in Me? The Effects of the Student-Teacher Demographic Match on Teacher Expectations,” Gershenson et al. (2015) cited a 1968 experiment conducted by Rosenthal and Jacobson that highlighted teachers' expectations:

Teachers' forecast can affect students' performance. Rosenthal and Jacobson manipulated teachers' beliefs of students' ability by providing false information regarding students' performance on a non-existent test and found significantly greater school-year gains among the students who were falsely identified to

teachers as “growth spurts.” It is troubling then, that teachers have significantly lower expectations for the educational attainment of socioeconomically disadvantaged and racial minority students (Boser et al., as cited in Gershenson et al., 2015, p. 2)

Limited beliefs, incorrect beliefs, and biased expectations can lead teachers to have negative expectations about their Latino students (Gershenson et al., 2015). Teachers play an important role in shaping students’ beliefs about their academic success (Burgess & Greaves, 2013; Dee, as cited in Gershenson et al., 2015). This is even more relevant when working with particularly disadvantaged students who rarely interact with college-educated adults outside of school. After analyzing data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 which was conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics, Gershenson et al. concluded that non-Black teachers of Black students have significantly lower expectations than do Black teachers. This study looked at 16,810 student-teacher dyads, each containing exactly two teacher expectations per student, for whom the relevant socio-economic demographic variables were observed. These authors that Black teachers have higher expectations for Black students than White teachers, citing that this difference is marginally significant. The findings of this study also suggest that non-Black teachers have significantly lower educational expectations for Black students than do Black teachers.

In his research on self-fulfilling prophecies and the educational outcomes of Latino/a students, Guyll et al. (2010) explored the relationship between Latino/a ethnic identity and academic performance. His findings suggested that Latinos in the United

States face a multitude of sociological and economic barriers in achieving academic success. For example,

The tolerance of unabashed anti-Latino/a rhetoric in the public discourse, combined with the increasing size and visibility of Latino/as in the United States, are likely to provoke greater stereotyping, prejudice, stigmatization, and discrimination against Latino/as, thereby setting the stage for these processes to occur. (Guyll et al., 2010, p. 114)

In addition to self-fulfilling prophecies, Guyll et al. also explored stigma consciousness and stereotype threat. This research offered suggestions on the potential to enrich understanding of the relationship between Latino ethnicity and academic performance. In this article, Guyll et al. considered how self-fulfilling prophecy, stigma consciousness, and stereotype threat could mediate relations between these cultural factors and Latino achievement. Guyll et al. explained that self-fulfilling prophecies can have long-term and negative influences on the outcome of the targets who are perceived unfavorably, ultimately widening the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged groups. On the issue of stereotype-based beliefs, Guyll et al. wrote that the factors associated with being less acculturated might also lead school personnel to rely on inaccurate stereotypes. Given that the Latino stereotype characterizes Latinos as intellectually inferior, greater reliance on the stereotype may negatively bias impressions of their academic ability, leading to false beliefs, differential treatment, and lower achievement (Guyll et al., 2010). These authors' final consideration of low academic achievement among Latinos was stigma consciousness.

Stigma conscious is the extent to which people are self-conscious about being a member of a stereotyped group and expect to be stereotyped by others (Brown & Pinel, as cited by Guyll, 2010). Stigma conscious students may not seek out and use all available sources of educational support such as guidance counselors, tutors, or teaching assistants. A reluctance to take advantage of these resources of support along with the school's failure to provide effective outreach, may undermine the students' ability to reach his or her potential (Guyll, 2010).

In 2007, Tenenbaum and Ruck conducted four separate meta-analyses on teachers' expectations of minority students. The topics of these meta-analyses were: (a) differences in teachers' expectations of ethnic minority versus European American children; (b) differences in teachers' special education, disciplinary, or gifted referral rates between ethnic minorities and European-American children; (c) teachers' positive and neutral speech; and (d) teacher' negative speech. In their meta-analysis study of teacher expectations of European American students and racial minority students, Tenenbaum and Ruck confirmed that "teachers hold more positive expectations for European American children than African American and Latino/a children" (2007, p. 267). In three of the four meta-analyses, the researchers found significant effects suggesting that teachers "held more positive expectations, made more positive referrals and fewer negative referrals, and provided more positive and neutral speech for European American children than for African American and Latino/a children" (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007, p. 267). Tenenbaum and Ruck concluded their study by explaining that "Teachers' expectancies may lead to differential academic performance for



children...and are likely to contribute to a less than fair classroom climate and limited educational opportunities for African American and Latino/a students ” (2007, p. 271).

If teachers have preconceived notions about their students’ academic potential, it is impossible to ensure that all students, especially Latino students, are receiving rigorous and unbiased instruction. Howard (2010) posited that all students are capable of being academically successful; however, in order to begin this process of reversing underachievement, a number of scholars have suggested that it is most important for teachers to internalize the belief that students from all backgrounds are capable of learning (Gay, as cited in Howard, 2010). This leads one to think about the ramifications of low-academic capabilities that are thrust upon minority students. Having seen teachers minimize the academic potential of Latino students, I believe that this type of deficit thinking needs to change. As Howard indicated,

Deficit-based notions of students, low expectations, and less than ideal instructional quality are all possibilities when teachers question the intellectual capacities of any student, but these issues are most harmful when students’ abilities are questioned based solely on factors such as socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, culture, language, or gender. (p. 42)

Further, Terrel and Marck (as cited in Howard, 2010) asserted,

It has been documented that some teachers have lower expectations for minority students because they feel sorry for the student. In so doing, they become sympathetic teachers, who, in turn, do not challenge students because they have accepted the fact that they are somehow cognitively challenged. (p.48)

On the other hand, empathetic teachers listen to and learn from their students and continue to hold them accountable for academic rigor. These teachers expect and demand excellence. Table 1 below demonstrates what Howard classifies as the characteristics of sympathetic and empathetic teachers. Howard presented a list of typical characteristics for both “sympathetic” educators and “empathetic” educators.

**Table 1***Characteristics of Sympathetic and Empathetic Teachers*

Sympathetic Educators	Empathetic Educators
Lower expectations of students due to race, poverty, or language	Hold students accountable despite difficult circumstances
See limitations in students	See promise and possibilities in students
See deficits in students	See assets in students
Paralyzed by problems	Become active problem solvers
Have narrow, limited teacher repertoire due to perceived student capacity	Develop critical and complex teacher practices to engage students
Place little to no value on students' perspectives or voice	Listen and learn from students' experiences to inform teachers
View learning as a teacher-dominated practice, with students having little to offer	View learning as a reciprocal process between teacher and student

It is his belief that if teachers view their students as having the ability to achieve, they will achieve. If a teacher expects the best from each student, each student will meet that expectation.

As I immersed myself in the literature about teachers' perception of minority students, I learned from Willis D. Hawley and Sonia Nieto (2010) that "When it comes to maximizing learning opportunities and outcomes for students from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds, race and ethnicity matter" (p. 66). These researchers explained that just because teachers talk about race in the classroom, this does not make them

discriminatory; they are just realistic. Almost everyone, regardless of skin color, are biased against—or at least uncomfortable with—people whose race and ethnicity are different from their own. Hawley and Nieto suggested that educators need to step in the right directions when working with ethnic minorities. First, they need to understand how race affects teaching and learning. “Commitment to race- and ethnicity-conscious strategies for school improvement begins by understanding the influence of race and ethnicity in behavior and on attitudes about racial and ethnic differences” (Hawley & Nieto, 2010, p.66). Secondly, most people are not aware of their own dispositions about people of other races or ethnicities. Therefore, it is essential to learn how to question one’s own beliefs. Lastly, many people of color see their opportunities as limited and fear that they will experience discrimination. “All students bring cultural values and experiences to their education, yet schools frequently disregard them, particularly teachers who are unfamiliar with their students’ culture (Gonzalez et al., as cited in Hawley & Nieto, 2010, p. 69).

I believe that if teachers are able to recognize that many of their students enter school with different cultural norms and attitudes toward teachers and education, they will be better prepared to guide their students to be successful. Understanding their students’ culture and beliefs can help teachers develop culturally relevant lessons. Gloria Ladson-Billings discussed culturally relevant pedagogy in her widely-read article, “But That’s Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy” (1995). This author defined culturally relevant pedagogy as

Pedagogy of oppression (1992c) not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment. Culturally relevant

pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) Student must experience academic success: (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence: and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160)

Ladson-Billings (2001) explained that linking schooling to the culture of the students is good teaching and makes a great deal of sense. Given that the number of culturally diverse students is increasing in American schools, learning about CRT is vital. Ladson-Billings suggested that “if students’ home language is incorporated into the classroom, students are more likely to experience academic success” (1995, p. 159). Culturally relevant teaching utilizes students’ culture as a vehicle for learning. In addition to linking students’ culture to lessons, Ladson-Billings cited the need to develop a critical conscience: “Students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (1995, p. 162).

Another researcher in the field of culturally relevant pedagogy is Geneva Gay. In an article entitled “Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching,” Gay (2002) highlighted ways in which teachers can improve their understanding of diverse learners. Gay described culturally responsive teaching as:

Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of

reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly. (Gay, 2002, p. 106)

Reinforce how using culturally responsive teaching contributes to students learning and then go to the following sentence. One of the many frustrations that I currently experience in my school is the inability of the middle school language arts and reading teachers to see the importance of connecting their novel studies to novels with a high Latino interest. I have suggested implementing newer more relevant novels with Latino characters into their curriculum; thus far, I have not been successful. I truly believe that if these teachers had the opportunity and training to help them connect their teaching to their students' culture, they would. Teachers need to "acquire factual information about the cultural particularities of specific ethnic groups (e.g., African, Asia, Latino, and Native American) This is needed to make schooling more interesting and stimulating for, representative of, and responsive to ethnically diverse students" (Gay, 2002, p. 107).

In the context of Latino students and how they continue to score below their White peers, I remember what Hawley and Nieto (2010) had to say about surface issues related to race and ethnicity:

When schools examine data on student achievement, they invariably look at differences among racial groups, even though they may not look beyond superficial categories of racial differences, such as Asian American or Latino. But, ironically, proposals for improvement seldom suggest that student difficulties could be related to race or ethnicity. Nevertheless, instruction that is unresponsive to such differences and to ethnicity-related tensions in schools and classrooms may partially explain low achievement. (p. 77)

When I think of the middle school students in my school who are not reading at grade level, I often wonder if it is because they are not interested in reading books with White protagonists. Many of the books that are on the middle school reading list for the last 4 years, like *Hatchet*, *The Outsiders*, and *The Drummer Boy of Shiloh* are age-appropriate and follow common core standards, but are they meaningful to our Latino student population? It is my opinion that many other titles are available that would be more appealing to this specific student population.

In this chapter, I reviewed the historical inequities experienced by Latino children in the United States. I discussed how I used critical theory as my theoretical framework. I surveyed how this framework led of critical race theory and then to Latino critical race theory. I reviewed how deficit thinking can prevent Latino children from reaching their academic potential. Finally, I discussed teacher perception of Latino students, its expression, and its impact. I end the literature review with a considering how culturally responsive pedagogy can assist teachers in making school more interesting and stimulating to ethnically diverse students. In Chapter Three, I discuss the methodology and design of this study, which were selected with the goal of answering the research questions at the center of this dissertation.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

#### **Introduction**

What are teachers' perceptions of Latino students? How self-aware are teachers about their views of Latino students? My own experience with teachers led me to research the issue of teachers' perception of Latino students. Since beginning the doctoral process, I have considered which topic to select for my research extensively. Over the years of examining my topic, changing my topic, and refining its focus, my passion constantly returned to my original topic—that of teacher perception of Latino students. I experienced some negative instances with teachers' perceptions of me as a young Latina student, and because I see the same types of misperceptions in today's classrooms, I wonder why this continues to happen. I aimed to hear about how teachers perceive Latino students in their own words. In the interviews with the participants, they shared their stories and their personal accounts of teaching Latino students, as well as their attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about their Latino students. I asked questions about their expectations for these students, and their consideration of students' cultural background. Their responses to these inquiries enabled me to answer the study's research questions.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research methodology. I then describe the interview method that I used for this study and explain the rationale for choosing interviews as a method of collecting data. Next, I describe the research site and the research participants. I then outline the ethical considerations that I adhered to during this study. I relate my role as a researcher, disclose my subjectivity, and describe how I monitored it through reflexivity. Reflexivity suggests that the action-researchers



acknowledge and disclose their subjectivity and monitor its potential effect on their data collection and data interpretation (Rallis & Rossman, 2016). Finally, I provide examples of how I maximized the research findings' validity and trustworthiness throughout this study.

### **Research Methodology**

Creswell (2013) explained that qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive and theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems. To study the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to the collection of data. Qualitative research involves closer attention to the interpretive nature of inquiry and situating the study within the political, social, and cultural context of the researchers, as well as the reflexivity of the researchers in the accounts that they present.

In the first half of the 19th century when the scientific movement, industrialism, and technological development rose in Western society, positivism emerged to give an account of the triumphs of science and technology (Kim, 2016). At that time, empirical science was thought to be the only positive knowledge about the world. The positivistic spirit is alive and well in the world today, as evident by the use of the words *scientifically based research* being used 111 times in America's doctrine "No Child Left Behind" from 2002.

The research community has since experienced a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1962) that has given greater recognition to qualitative research, as researchers acknowledge that complex human concern cannot be understood by testable observations, general principles, and standardize knowledge. In qualitative research, the researchers often

collect data in the field as at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study. They do not bring individuals into a lab. Instead, qualitative researchers gather up-close information by talking directly to involved people and seeing them behave and act within their natural context.

Qualitative research is not an easy path, but one that explores the complex issues of what it means to be a human. Qualitative researchers understand that humans are complex beings that cannot be captured by numbers and statistics. The qualitative approach to research fosters particular ways of asking questions and particular ways of thinking through problems. The qualitative approach involves seeking the meaning people give to their world. “The social meaning people attribute to their experiences, circumstances and situations, as well as the meaning people embed into text and other objects, are the focus of qualitative research” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 12). Qualitative research uses words, rather than numbers, in its analysis.

For this study, the qualitative approach allowed me to gather/listen to the thoughts and ideas that teachers have about their Latino student in their own words. The stories told by the participant teachers about their classroom, about their Latino students, about the meaning they make of their Latino students’ homes, culture, and values, helped me to understand how they perceive these students. Through the anecdotes that the teachers related, I gained insight into how these meanings and perceptions of their own and their students’ social world are reflected in their teaching and the content of their curriculum. Methodology is an account of social reality or some component of social reality that extends further than what has been empirically investigated (Hesse-Biber & Leavy,

2011); therefore, a narrative methodology enabled me to document the stories that teachers were willing to share with me.

### **Narrative Approach**

Life involves continuous experiences and interactions with one's surroundings and oneself. One way of structuring these experiences is to organize them into meaningful unites (Torill Moen, 2006). A story or a narrative is one way of creating meaning. Storytelling is a natural way of recounting experiences and creating reasonable order out of these experiences. Narrative research is consistently focused on how individuals assign meaning to their experiences through the stories they tell. In this study, I sought to collect the stories that teaches of Latino students tell in order to learn and understand more about how they view their Latino students and how they know and relate to their cultural background. I aimed to document the lived experience of teachers working with Latino students. My focus was to learn from the teachers, as well as to be an open listener and an inquirer. As Bateson (2000) cited, the most important aspect of inquiry is an attitude that will foster learning. Bateson explains that everyone leads storied lives in storied landscapes. By listening and learning from the participants, it is possible to learn something new or different. This can create new understandings and attitudes toward the subject under study. This understanding may include information or difference that were not anticipated, which, in turn, change one's assumptions, values, and beliefs on the subject.

In Robert Cole's *The Call of Stories: Teaching and The Moral Imagination*, he described narrative inquiry as a blending of life, teaching, and learning. Cole recalled a time during his tenure as a psychologist when he realized that by listening to his patients,

he became the patient and they became the teacher. By allowing his patients to tell their stories, he became a better teacher. For Cole, it is the intimacy of the inquirer and the participant that is key. Another researcher, Polkinghorne (as cited in Bateson, 2000), explained that researchers are concerned with people's stories: they work with case histories and use narrative explanations to understand why the people they work with behave the way they do.

A narrative approach allowed me to gather data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of these experiences (Creswell, 2013). I sought to understand how teachers view their Latino students and their perception of Latino students; thus, a narrative approach allowed them to retell stories, details, memories, and descriptions of events. The narrative design allowed the participant-teachers to elaborate and explain their experiences with teaching Latino students in their own words. This approach allowed me to incorporate their feelings, goals, perceptions, and values into the stories that they shared. Narrative inquiry provides explanatory knowledge of human experiences, which allows the portrayal of rich nuances of meaning in stories.

### **Research Site**

Latino students make up 26 percent of all students enrolled in Illinois schools in 2019. Latino educators, however, only represent 6.7 percent of all teachers in the state of Illinois. This is a large disparity, and one that might contribute to answering my research questions. Therefore, I chose to interview teachers who teach in heavily populated Latino schools. I considered whether the ethnicity of the teachers being interviewed would make a difference on how they perceive their Latino students. I concluded that by selecting

only Latina or only selecting White teachers would require two different research studies; one for Latina teachers' perceptions and one for White teachers' perceptions. In future studies, I—or other scholars—may wish to select only Latina or only White teachers for the same research question.

The teachers that were interviewed for this study came from a variety of elementary and high schools in the Chicagoland area. The table below presents the demographic information of each school. I selected these schools because they have a Latino student population higher than 20%.

**Table 2***School Demographics*

Teacher Name	Total Number of Students	White Students	Latino Students	Low Income Students	English Language Learners
1 Linda	645	16.60%	75.50%	75.80%	42.90%
2 Jose	439	14.10%	80.20%	59.70%	56.30%
3 Barbara	653	79%	11.30%	21.40%	13.90%
4 Dela	3,641	44%	25.50%	35.80%	19.30%
5 Carole	645	16.60%	75.50%	75.80%	42.90%
6 Maria	1,711	54.20%	31%	21.9	4.90%

The table above illustrates the demographic makeup of the student population in each school. These schools have similar demographics such as a White student population ranging from 8% to 25.9%. The Latino population ranges from 11% to 88%. Due to the number of Latino students represented in each school, I anticipated that the participating teachers would have extensive experience working with Latino students. Based on the information above, the majority of students attending these schools are Latino, and between 13–57% are English language learners. Student mobility is between 5–10 percent, and chronic truancy runs from 2 to nearly 24 percent. The stories of the participants were shared through the interviews. The interview process allowed the participants to freely report their thoughts about teaching Latino students.

## **Participants**

Depending on the goal of the topic, qualitative researchers can employ varying sample sizes and participant selection techniques. The participants of the research study are those who affect or are affected by the issue under investigation (Efrat & Ravid, 2020). Because I was interviewing teachers' perception of Latino students, I chose to interview teachers who have experience teaching Latino students. The selection of teachers for this study took place over a series of several months. I first reached out to the principals of elementary, middle, and high schools in the near western suburbs of Chicago. In my introductory email, I asked whether they would forward my email to their staff. I asked teachers who wanted to volunteer to please contact me via email or by phone. From there, I heard back from five teachers. The actions, behaviors, and perceptions of these teachers contributed valuable information that enabled me to answer the research questions. The rationale for selecting these specific schools and asking for volunteers from these specific schools was based on the percent of Latino students enrolled in these schools. In order to gain valuable information about teacher perception of Latino students, I selected schools with a high population of Latino students. The participating teachers were required to have a minimum of 5 years teaching experience. They all worked in a predominantly Latino school district. They were between the ages of 30 and 50 years old at the time of the study. In addition, they all held an ESL/Bilingual Endorsement for the state of Illinois.

## **Data Collection Tools**

I utilized interviews as the data collection strategy. Interviews provided an opportunity for in-depth conversations and allowed me to ask questions that were directly

related to the study topic and purpose (Efrat & Ravid, 2020). I selected a semistructured interview format for this study. The next section includes the questions that I prepared to guide me through the interview process. This strategy provided me with an understanding of the participants' experiences from their own perspective. They were able to voice their ideas, opinions, and knowledge about their Latino students. Creswell (2013) emphasized the importance of reflecting on the relationship that exists between the interviewer and the interviewee. I ensured that the interview process did not create an unequal power dynamic between the interviewee and myself; I did not want them to feel "ruled" by me (Creswell, 2013, p.173). Kvale and Brinkmann (as cited in Creswell, 2013) suggested a more collaborative style of interviewing, in which the researcher and the participant approach equality in questioning, interpreting, and reporting.

I invited invite each teacher out for coffee or tea at a local coffee shop or restaurant. I interviewed each teacher separately and then coded the results. Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes, depending on their elaboration. I interviewed interview one teacher at a time. In order to make them feel more comfortable, I began my interview with a brief description of myself and what I was researching. I recorded the interview and took notes during the conversation to document participants' nonverbal behavior and other contextual details. I allowed sufficient time for each teacher to share their thoughts on each question. The semistructured nature of the interview enabled me to ask follow-up questions as necessary, and allowed participants to relate issues that perhaps were not included in my original questions. The follow-up questions were asked to encourage teachers to extend and deepen their responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).



After reviewing their interviews, I contacted the teachers and asked for clarification if needed.

### **Interview Questions**

1. Tell me the story of how you became a classroom teacher.
2. You have probably had positive and negative moments in your teaching career.  
  
Please, relate some of the moments and tell me specific incidents connected with each.
3. Tell me about the racial makeup of your classroom over your teaching career. Has it changed?
4. What do you think gets in the way or prevents a Latino student from becoming academically successful? Can you give an example of this?
5. What do you think makes a Latino student fail academically? Can you give me an example?
6. Tell me about a time when a Latino student was successful in school and describe that to me.
7. Tell me about a time when a Latino student was not successful in school and describe that to me.
8. Tell me about any deficits Latino students bring to school. Please explain.
9. Tell me about any strengths Latino students bring to school. Please explain.
10. What do you see as a reason why Latino students lag behind their White peers?  
  
Explain.
11. Tell me about a time you experienced a Latino student being academically successful in school.

12. Tell me about a time you experienced a Latino student not being academically successful in school.
13. Tell me about a time you witnessed a Latino student improve his/her academics in school.
14. Tell me what you think Latino students can do to improve their academic success.
15. What can teachers do to improve that academic success of Latino students?
16. Do you think there could be a genetic component that can explain the academic success between a White and a Latino student?
17. What needs to change in order to improve the academic success of Latino students?

### **Ethical Consideration**

In conducting this study, I followed the ethical guidelines set forth by the Institutional Research Review Board (IRRB). In order to ensure the safety of all participants, I completed and passed the IRRB training on September 23, 2018 (see Appendix A). To maintain confidentiality, participants were informed that their identity would remain confidential. Their names were not used in any written material concerning the research or in discussions of the research project, and all interview materials were stored in a safe place to which only I had access (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The participants were asked to sign an informed consent letter (see Appendix B) that outlined the purpose of the study and their role as participants. They were informed of any potential risks and that they had the ability to follow up with any questions. They were also informed that their participation in this study was completely voluntary and that they were free to opt out of the study before, during, or after their initial participation. They

were informed that the interviews would be audio-taped and that I would take proper measures to ensure the safety of the collected data.

### **Researcher's Role**

At the center of the discussion about the researcher's role is the question about the subjective or objective stance that the researcher assumes during the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Qualitative researchers perceive subjectivity as an integral part of the research process. They often reinforce the personal dimensions of the study by disclosing their past and present involvement with the topic (Efron & Ravid, 2020). As total objectivity was virtually impossible to achieve, given my immersion in education research, my role as a researcher was to ensure disciplined subjectivity. A self-aware statement of my values, assumptions, and biases was clearly and honestly presented. I remained thoughtful about my preconceived notions about the study's topic and practices disciplined subjectivity (Efrat & Ravid, 2020).

I have personally experienced negative attitudes from teachers and have witnessed Latino students being treated negatively as a teacher and as an administrator; therefore, I practiced what is defined as disciplined subjectivity (Efron & Ravid, 2020). I ensured that my personal experiences did not interfere with my subjectivity. I did not allow my biases to influence this study. It was my responsibility as the researcher to ensure that any preconceived notions about teachers' perceptions of Latino students did not color the processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. My role centered on collecting thoughts and stories from the teachers who teach Latino students on a daily basis. My role was to document the honest and self-reflective thoughts that teachers of Latino students wish to share with me. I then analyzed and synthesized the data, and detailed my

findings. I understand that my own values, beliefs, and past experiences with teachers might have interfered with this process, but I mitigated these impacts by acknowledging my subjectivity, monitoring its potential effects, and practicing continuous reflexivity and self-awareness.

### **Analysis and Synthesis of Data**

Efron and Ravid (2020) cited that during data analysis, the researcher usually describes the systematic process that will be used for coding the data, identifying emerging categories, and synthesizing and interpreting the discovered patterns. Data analysis in qualitative research involves examining raw data, reducing them to themes through coding and recording process, and representing the data in figures, tables, and narratives in a final research text (Kim, 2016). I first completed a multiple coding process in which I attempted to find a word or a short phrase that could be attributed to a portion of my data. Next, I identified relationships between similar codes and combined them to make a category. Lastly, I defined an emerging pattern in each category, which could then be built as a theme (Kim, 2016).

### **Validity and Trustworthiness/Positionality**

One of the most important issues concerning a narrative study in qualitative research is the issue of validity and trustworthiness. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) described validity as the process of earning the confidence of the reader that the researcher has “gotten it right.” That is, trustworthiness takes the place of truth. In social science, validity is one of the criteria that traditionally serve as a benchmark for inquiry (Schwandt, 2007). Creswell (2013) considered validity in qualitative research to be an attempt to assess the “accuracy” of the findings, as best described by the researcher and

the participant (p. 249). Creswell explained that validation is a strength of qualitative research, in that the account made through extensive time spent in the field, detailed thick description, and the closeness of the researcher to the participants in the study all add to the value or accuracy of the study.

Efron and Ravid (2020) explained that in the context of qualitative studies, validity refers to the extent to which data reflects participants' views of the issue being explored. In fact, practitioners often prefer the term trustworthiness to describe the kind of data used in qualitative inquiry. Thick description refers to a detailed and rich account of the research context and a presentation of the participants' perspective in their own words (Efron & Ravid, 2020)). The findings were validated through the collection of a thick description. I built trust with the participating teachers based on my own experience as a teacher, which I will share with each of them.

### **Summary of Methodology**

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the research methodology. I explained the rationale for choosing interviews as the data collection instrument, the selection of the research site, and the inclusion criteria for the research participants. I also discussed ethical considerations and the steps that I took to maintain participants' confidentiality. I disclosed my subjectivity and how I used thick description and reflexivity to monitor the potential effect of this subjectivity on data collection and interpretation.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS**

#### **Dissertation Purpose Statement**

The purpose of my dissertation is to investigate why Latino students are still lagging behind their White peers, and within that context, to explore how teachers perceive Latino students and whether that perception impacts Latino students' learning. I also focused on one of the many issues that may or may not affect the academic success of Latino students: teachers' perceptions of Latino students in the classroom. In this study, my purpose was to explore teachers' perceptions and examine to what degree teachers recognize their own biases about Latino students.

In this chapter, I discuss the background information on each of the participants, their educational careers, and the journey that led them to their current position. In addition, I will provide the specific answers the participants provided to the following questions: (a) What makes Latino students academically successful? (b) What gets in the way of a Latino student's academic success? (c) What can Latino students do to improve their academic success? (d) What can teachers do to improve the academic success of Latino students? and (e) What can schools do to improve the academic success of Latino students? In the second part of this chapter, I provide insight into the notion of bias in the field of education and discuss how teacher bias can play a role in the academic success of Latino students. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary.

I learned quite a bit more than I was anticipating from my participants about their thoughts on Latino student academic achievement. Over the course of 1 month, I was able to interview all six participants via Zoom. Interviews lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours

each. I noticed that some participants needed further explanation in order to answer the questions, but overall, they were able to provide clear answers. I felt that I was able to build rapport with each participant. I felt that they trusted me because I noticed that when I shared my own life experiences, they began to open up to me and shared intimate details about their teaching experiences.

I began the data analysis process assigning a pseudonym to each of my participants. Next, I created a spreadsheet that included the teacher's name, age, grade level they teach, educational certifications, the number of years they have been teaching, and their ethnicity demographics. In addition, I created a spreadsheet that included information on their school districts, such as the number of students, percentages of Latino, White and Black students. Table 3 below provides the participant's demographics, and Table 4 portrays the participants' school demographics.

**Table 3**

*Participant Teacher Demographics*

Pseudonym	Age	Grade	Discipline	Ethnicity	Years of Experience	Highest Degree
Linda	34	4th	Special Education	White/ Jewish	13	Two Masters
Joe	43	4th	Bilingual	Hispanic/ Latino	18	Masters
Barb	30	K-8	ESL	White	8	Masters
Dela	36	6th-8th	Bilingual Resources	Mexican, German, English	14	Masters ESL Masters in Reading
Carole	47	1st-7th	Reading Specialist	White	24	
Maria	40	K-5	ESL	Hispanic	15	Masters

**Table 4***Participants' School Demographics*

	Participant Name	Number of Students	White Students	Latino Students	Low Income Students	English Language Learners
1	Linda	645	16.60%	75.50%	75.80%	42.90%
2	Jose	439	14.10%	80.20%	59.70%	56.30%
3	Barbara	653	79%	11.30%	21.40%	13.90%
4	Dela	3,641	44%	25.50%	35.80%	19.30%
5	Carole	645	16.60%	75.50%	75.80%	42.90%
6	Maria	1,711	54.20%	31%	21.9	4.90%

Next, I began identifying predetermined categories to serve as a guide for grouping my data. I used predetermined categories because I felt that if I simply asked whether or not my participants have a racialized understanding of Latino student academic achievement, they might not be forthcoming. Instead, I asked five questions that would allow them to reveal their understanding and perception of Latino students' academic achievement. In addition, I asked my participants to talk about the biases that they may or may not have heard about Latinos. That is, I did not ask my participants to reveal their own biases about Latino students, but rather what they have heard others say about Latinos. I was surprised at the depth of honesty that some of my participants revealed. The five predetermined categories included the following questions:

1. What makes Latino students academically successful?
2. What gets in the way of Latino students' academic success?



3. What can Latino students do to improve their academic success?
4. What can teachers do to improve the academic success of Latino students?
5. What can schools do to improve the academic success of Latino students?

The three predetermined categories surrounding biases against Latino students are:

1. Can you think of a time when you witnessed a teacher demonstrating a lack of understanding of the Latino culture?
2. When thinking of society as a whole, what biases toward Latino students have you heard?
3. What biases toward Latino students do you think need to change to improve Latino students' academic outcomes?

After interviewing the six participants, I listened to each interview recording several times. Each time I learned something new. I employed a third-party company to perform the transcription. I spent weeks reading each interview transcript multiple times, which enabled me to identify emerging categories, similarities, and differences to my predetermined categories. Efron and Ravid (2020) suggested creating a list of categories, combing through the transcripts, and looking for segments in the data that belong to each category. After I formulated the categories and read each response numerous times, I was able to group my data into central themes. Once I had created the themes, I created a matrix that illustrated the major themes and the data that supported them.

### **Participant Demographics**

I recruited an initial sample of eight teachers representing a variety of grades, school districts, and educational backgrounds. All eight teachers voluntarily agreed to be a part of this study. The recruitment process for this study began in 2019. I was very

excited to begin since I had waited almost 1 year until we, the participants, and I could actually sit down for the interview in 2020. COVID-19 slowed down the interview process due to the limited ability to interact face-to-face with other people.

Moreover, two of my participants were unable to meet due to scheduling issues. We tried numerous times to meet via Zoom, but our interview never materialized. I was successful in securing and interviewing the remaining six participants. Once I realized that the pandemic would be around for a long time, I decided to interview the participants via Zoom. This worked better than expected because by the time I started the interview process, the participants had already been using Zoom to teach their students and were already accustomed to using the platform.

The names of all participants have been changed to pseudonyms. The following section includes in-depth descriptions of the six interview participants that agreed to be interviewed via Zoom. All six participants are passionate educators who shared their intimate stories of how and why they entered the field of education.

Five of the six participants teach were at the elementary level the other participant teaches at the middle school level. Each has own specialty, such as bilingual education, reading specialist, and ESL. To better understand the description of participants for this study, I will explain the variety of terms utilized in education to determine the type of instruction an English language learner receives throughout the day and which of these instructional methods apply to the participants. Outside of the general education classroom, one of the most notable methods of instruction is the bilingual classroom. For a classroom to be classified as a bilingual classroom, the teacher must be bilingual in another language in addition to English, such as Spanish, Polish, or Arabic. The children

in a bilingual classroom are taught grade-level content in their home language. They must also receive English language instruction for a designated time during the day. In this study, one participant fell into this category: Jose, who teaches in a fourth-grade bilingual classroom. The following most notable method of instruction is English as a second language (ESL). This term is outdated and has been replaced with English language learners (ELL). Researchers have noted that in many cases, English is not necessary a second language for some students. In many instances, English is the third or even fourth language that a student is learning, hence eliminating the word “second.” Some school districts continue to use the term ESL, while others have switched to using the term ELL. It is also essential to note that students in these classrooms are referred to as English learners (EL). This is a widely accepted term for children learning English, but is not confused with ELL, which is the term used to describe a method of instruction.

As not all school districts can offer bilingual education, the next best option is to provide students with ESL/ELL instruction. In the state where I conducted my research, the ESL/ELL teacher's role is to meet with English learners throughout the day and provide them with English instruction so they can be successful in their general education classrooms. On a typical day, the ELL teacher will pull out a few students from their general education classroom to provide direct, scaffolded instruction. In other cases, the ELL teacher pushes into the general education classroom and offers additional support for the EL student. In this study, three teachers fell into the category of ELL: Barbara, Dela, and Maria.

The participants also included a special education teacher and a reading specialist. Another type of teacher that needs to be explained is the bilingual resource teacher. The

term bilingual resource is usually used to distinguish between a bilingual classroom teacher and a resource teacher. Dela was the only bilingual resource teacher. This position is similar to an ESL teacher, in that they pull students out of their general education classroom and also push into their classrooms to provide comprehensible instruction. The only difference between the two is their title.

A reading specialist sees children much like an ELL teacher. She pulls students out of their general education classroom and provides them with direct reading instruction to build fluency or increase their reading comprehension. A special education teacher also meets with students throughout the day. A special education teacher has prescribed minutes to meet with her students based on the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). In this study, Carole is a reading specialist and Linda is a special education teacher. In the following segment, I provide a detailed description of each participant. This description will include information about how and why they chose education as their career, what they love about teaching, and a short demographic synopsis of the school in which they work.

### **Study Participants**

#### **Participant I: Linda**

Linda is a 34-year-old married mother of two small children. Linda stated that she is Jewish, but she does not identify as White. Linda always knew she wanted to be a special education teacher because she has an older brother with significant special needs. This experience influenced her from a young age to pursue a degree in special education. She first witnessed her parents' hardships through fighting the school system and finding the right educational fit for her brother. Linda recalled, "I got the families' perspective on special education from that experience."

After receiving her undergrad degree, Linda went to night school to get a master's degree in special education. She holds two master's degrees and teaches as an adjunct instructor at a nearby university. In addition, Linda holds a TESOL/ESL endorsement. Linda has worked 13 years in special education, and stated,

I love interacting with the kids. The kids are probably the thing I love the most, really helping them gain strategies for accessing their learning and coping with things when they're hard. The thing I often tell the kids is that you don't have to know everything, but you do have to be nice. And if you're nice, someone will help you. So just helping them work on some of those personal skills that will benefit them.

Linda co-teaches with a general education teacher. Her classroom usually consists of 23 to 24 students, of which 30 percent are special education students. Including these 30 percent in a "regular" classroom is done following the state regulation. Linda has 13 years of experience working with Latino students. Linda's school district has 645 students, of whom 76% are Latino and 16% are White. The school district serves preschool through eighth-grade students. It is located just outside of a large metropolitan city in the Midwest.

During our interview, I got the feeling that Linda was anxious to talk about education. I could sense the frustration in her voice as she described that lack of responsibility her students demonstrated. Linda perceives that many primary grade teachers need to hold students to higher standards and to make them accountable for the work they turn in. She cited examples of substandard homework assignments being turned in without a name or capital letters or periods. By the time these students come to

her in fourth grade, they need to be taught the basics that she feels should have been taught in the lower grades.

### **Participant II: Jose**

Jose was born and raised in a South American country, and education is his second career. In his home country, Jose was an industrial engineer. While in high school, he had an opportunity to teach fourth and fifth graders world history as a requirement for graduating high school. Jose explained, “So, it wasn’t a big assignment because you were a student in the school. But that was my debut in the teaching world. It was pretty cool, and I like history. So, that was pretty cool.” While in college, became a teacher assistant while his professor went to Spain to finish her doctorate: “So, actually, I was in charge of the whole semester.” His professor taught the first lesson before she left and the last lesson when she returned from Spain. Jose asserted that it was “a really cool experience, it was phenomenal.” While in college, Jose had another opportunity to teach, this time with 11th graders:

I actually got another teaching job...One of my college buddies had an uncle who ran a school, and he’s like, “You know what? You’re studying all that complicated math. Why don’t you teach my 11th graders physics and calculus, and you can teach them some English too.” So, I went every Friday from noon to 3:00 and taught them physics and calculus. I was in college, and they were in high school. I was young, but it was very different. It wasn’t teaching the way that you do with elementary. It was just more going there, showing them information and “bye,” and that was it. There was no connection. I barely knew their names, so very different, a very different story.

Jose skipped over the time between living in his home country and moving to

America. He simply said, “Because of life, I ended up in here,” so I did not pursue this aspect of the interview. He did share that once he moved to a southwestern state of the United States, he heard that this state had a shortage of bilingual teachers. He explained, “Schools were heavily recruiting professional people with college degrees that spoke Spanish and English so they would become bilingual teachers and I made use of it, and I became a teacher through an alternative certification program called ACP.” He earned a master’s degree in teaching. He recalled,

Back then, school districts went to Spain, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic to recruit bilingual teachers. They even went to other cities ~~to~~ like Miami, New York, and Los Angeles. At one point, the school districts were offering a \$5,000 signing bonus for bilingual teachers. That’s how big the need was.

Jose loves teaching; he stated that “it’s the connection with others” that he enjoys most. “I think that probably that’s what makes you teach. Academia has always been something that I enjoy.” Jose also asserted that “Every teaching assignment that I’ve had, like when I taught kindergarten, I loved it. When I taught third grade, I loved it. When I taught fifth grade, I liked it. You make the best of it. You do. And I’m sure that I will enjoy middle school too.”

Today Jose is a bilingual fourth-grade bilingual teacher in a small school district located just outside of a major metropolitan Midwestern city. He has a total of 18 years of teaching experience. His school district serves preschool through eighth-grade students. Of the 439 students in the district, 80% are Latino and 14% are White. Jose was different from all the other participants. Not only was he the only male in the group, he asked me more questions than the rest. Jose was very interested in my research. He wanted to know

how my research would change the field of education. I explained that I am simply a doctoral student right now, but perhaps in the future I plan to share my findings with school districts in hopes of reducing the Latino educational gap.

### **Participant III: Barbara**

Barbara is a bilingual kindergarten through eighth grade ESL teacher in a small suburb outside of a larger metropolitan Midwestern city. She is a recent newlywed and a new homeowner. Barbara is Caucasian, but has an innate love for the Spanish language and culture. Her interview was the longest compared to the rest of my participants because she gave such rich examples. After Barbara answered all the questions, she asked me a wide variety of questions about the doctoral process. She is very interested in pursuing a doctorate in bilingual education. She wanted to advise on which university she should apply to and how she might be able to use her degree in the future. By the end of our conversation, she admitted that this is probably not the time to go back to college because she and her husband want to start a family. I told her that it will never be a good time and that she should just try to make it work. Barbara has taught for 8 years. Her school has 653 students, of which 11% are Latino and 79% are White. Barbara holds a master's degree in teaching and a bilingual/ESL endorsement. Barbara became a teacher because

Ever since I can remember, I wanted to be a teacher. I fell in love with my kindergarten teacher. And so, I came home telling my mom I wanted to be a kindergarten teacher. And then, as I grew up, I thought maybe I want to teach this or maybe I want to teach that. But it was always that I wanted to be a teacher.

Barbara first learned to speak Spanish in eighth grade. In college, she studied in Spain for one summer. After that, she studied in Ecuador for 1 month. Her future plans



include a visit to South America. Barbara loves making connections with her students.

She stated enthusiastically:

I like seeing their success. And I like when they can kind of get more self-esteem from their success and get more confidence. I like when they surprise me. Like when I'm going to teach a lesson, and I think okay, here are the things that they're going to come up with. And then, they come up with something way better. I love that!

Barbara is not quite sure when, but sometime during high school, she realized that there was something called dual-language. Consequently,

I just realized that was the absolute coolest thing to be able to teach kids in two different languages and to finally have space where those kids can feel like their native language is a good thing and an asset and somewhere where they can feel safe.

She added, "So, that's when I decided yeah, I want to do dual language and help those kids out." Barbara explained that although she loves teaching and tries to make learning a positive experience for her students, she had negative expertise with a few high school teachers. I sensed that these experiences have led to her desire to be the complete opposite of them. Barbara felt that her teacher ignored her. Although she was in a few advanced classes in high school, she explained that

I felt like I belonged there and had earned my way there. But it was just like everything I turned in; I got bad grades and kind of vague feedback and suggestions on how even to get better. And it just felt like that teacher was like, you're not good, and I don't care how to make you better. And I don't care if you

drop this class or not. Ultimately, I did drop that class because I was like the teacher doesn't care about me.

As a student Barbara, also felt that "I'm not getting any good grades. All of this feels awful. I feel awful. I'm getting all of these bad grades that say I'm so bad and I don't know why I'm bad." Barbara commented that she could see how this is happening to students today. She connected her life experience to how EL students are treated today in her school: "A lot of times, teachers of EL students just kind of go like, 'Oh, well, they're just EL. As long as they get a C that's fine.'" She indicated that these teachers do not put enough much effort into teaching English language learners. She thought that some teachers project this feeling onto their students, which students can feel. When I asked her if she has seen this play out in her school, she replied, "Yeah, plenty of times in all grade levels. Even in first grade, yeah." She added, "Kids can tell if a teacher is spending a lot of time with one student and not with them. They start to wonder why that is."

#### **Participant IV: Dela**

Dela was one of the most interesting participants to interview. She shared that she has traveled to Peru and other South American countries over the course of her teaching experience. In 2010, she left her teaching position in the United States and moved to Peru, where she lived in a small village and taught elementary school to the less fortunate young children in the village. She remained in Peru for 2 years before returning home and obtaining a new teaching position. She was soft-spoken and very much wants to improve the lives of her students. It was evident through our conversation that Dela has an overarching sense of giving back to her community and enriching the lives of her bilingual students.

Dela is a bilingual middle school resource teacher with 14 years of teaching experience. She holds a master's degree in ESL and a bilingual/ESL endorsement. Dela works in a large suburban school district located outside of a large metropolitan Midwestern city. Of the 3,600 students in her district, 25.5% are Latino and 44% are White. Early in life, Dela was not sure what she wanted to be when she grew up. Her mother suggested that she study to be a Spanish teacher by the middle school because Barbara liked Spanish and liked school. Dela enjoyed babysitting and felt that she was good with little kids. When she entered high school, she began to learn Spanish. By her junior year, she was assigned to write a research paper. Her topic was bilingual education: "I'll research bilingual education, and if it turns out that it's good then, I'll be a bilingual teacher. And if it turns out that it's bad then, I'll be a Spanish teacher." Dela had another reason for choosing to be a teacher. She admitted:

So, I'm a Christian, and my faith is a big part of my life. So, I also feel called to service. And I feel like, well, I felt like at the time, minorities and the Latino population were one of the very underserved communities. And that was one of the other motivations of this area, specifically, this population. So, that's why I felt called to go into that. So, that's why I'm a teacher.

Dela enjoys the fulfillment she receives by teaching and witnessing the "a-ha" moments when she can visually see that her students learn something new. She explained, "Those moments are priceless." In addition, she feels that "God has clearly put me here for a reason." She works with a lot of recent immigrants and thinks that God makes appointments for her. She states that she often helps students and families in ways that have nothing to do with academics. For example, "Kids will confide in me about

rough situations at home or worries about their parents or that kind of thing; those are the moments that really reaffirm for me why I'm in this position and why I do this job."

### **Participant V: Carole**

Carole is a monolingual reading specialist in a small suburban preschool through eighth-grade school district located outside a large metropolitan Midwestern city. Carole is the mother of four adolescents: a daughter and a set of triplets that are made up of two boys and one girl. Although Carole was eager to be a part of this research, I sensed that the questions were making her uncomfortable. As she answered each question, I felt that she was holding back potentially to avoid sounding ill-informed. When we discussed sensitive issues like bias against Latino students, I noticed that her body language changed and she provided only surface-level answers.

Carole has been teaching for 24 years and holds a master's degree in reading. This small school district has just over 650 students; 76% of them are Latino. When asked why she became a teacher, Carole responded, "So, actually, I had no interest in going into education at all." When she was in high school, she had the opportunity to work at a daycare center. It was an after-school job opportunity where she could walk to work. Carole states that "All the daycare teachers were constantly telling me that whatever I decided to do in life, don't go into teaching." But the more time that she spent there, the more time she realized that she did enjoy working with kids. For a period of time, she wanted to pursue a Type 75 administrative certificate. She soon concluded, however, that "the more I veered away from the classroom, the more I realized that is just not what I wanted to do. I really like the interactions with kids, the creativity that comes with it, and really like seeing those 'a-ha' moments." Carole loves teaching because she never sees the same day twice. She explained that she gets bored quickly, so she is constantly

looking for things to do and things that keep her engaged. She stated that “I love that there’s always a new obstacle to encounter or a student who you’re going to have to try to figure out how to grab them, how to reach them.” Because Carole is a reading specialist, she does not have a classroom in the traditional sense. Her students come to her small classroom in groups of six to eight. When I asked her to tell me the racial makeup of her students, she replied, “The majority are ELLs” I found this odd because I know that she knows that ELL is not a racial designation. I had to specifically ask her if her students were Latino, to which she responded, “Yes.” I know that talking about race made her uncomfortable; I could see it in her body language. It was quite interesting that Carole answered all the questions through the lens of a reading specialist during this interview. I find this narrow view a bit troubling because education should be multidimensional teachers should cast a more comprehensive lens when teaching and assessing students.

#### **Participant VI: Maria**

Maria was very excited to be a part of the interview. I got the sense that she wanted to share her stories and her convictions about bilingual education and bilingual students. Maria is a bilingual kindergarten through fifth-grade ESL teacher. As an EL teacher, Maria sees students in a variety of settings. Her students are all English language learners in general education classrooms with a general education teacher instead of being in a bilingual or a dual language classroom setting. For most of the day, her students are taught by teachers who do not have an ESL endorsement; therefore, they are not in compliance with Illinois State Board of Education guidelines. According to these guidelines, all English language students must receive specialized instruction by an ESL endorsed teacher.

Her school district is located just outside of a large metropolitan Midwestern city. She has over 15 years of teaching experience and holds a master's degree in teaching along with a bilingual/ESL endorsement. The demographic makeup of her district is 54% White and 31% Latino. Maria's mom is an immigrant from Mexico that has lived in the United States for 20 years. As a young child, Maria remembers going with her mother to adult ESL classes and learning how to find the square root for the first time at these adult ESL classes. It was during this time that Maria became infatuated with learning and school. She recalled,

I've always loved school, so I enjoyed going with her because I felt like I was learning, you know? And so, I didn't realize it at the time, but I really think that's what led me down the path. It wasn't that one day I said, "Oh, I want to be a teacher; this is what I want to do. It's just kind of like life led me that way, if that makes sense.

After high school, Maria enrolled in college, graduated with a teaching degree and a minor in math. Her first teaching position was in Colorado Springs, where she worked for 2 years. She stated,

More than half of my class was made up of ELs. And these were students that were coming from Mexico and had barely any English." "I mean, they were all at different levels, and so it was the first time I realized like that even though I had just gotten my teaching certificate, I felt really unprepared to work with ELs. Even though I understood their struggles and went through some similar things, our experiences were different. I never went to school in Mexico, and they did.

Maria realized that she needed to learn how best to teach this population of students:

I did my best just to research online and learn about EL strategies on my own. Still, I told my husband like, “Okay, as soon as we go back home, I need to go back to school and get an EL endorsement. I need to be better equipped to work with these students. Yeah, it wasn’t enough just to know their language.” Maria’s profound insight into her lack of preparation led her to get her ESL endorsement. In the next section, I will describe the process that I utilized to identify the emerging themes.

I understand that some of the question I asked my participants to answer were going to be difficult for them to answer honestly. I understand that my question is asking them to reflect deeply about their attitudes and racial understanding of Latino student achievement. The best way to accomplish this was to embed five questions that will require them to consider their own potential biases. These predetermined categories were: (a) What makes Latino students academically successful? (b) What gets in the way of Latino students’ academic success? (c) What can Latino students do to improve their academic success? (d) What can teachers do to improve the academic success of Latino students? and (e) What can schools do to improve the academic success of Latino students? In addition, each participant was asked to talk about their understanding of the Latino culture and biases that may or may not exists about Latino students. The additional three predetermined categories address these issues: (a) Teachers demonstrating a lack of understanding of the Latino culture? (b) When thinking of society as a whole, what biases toward Latino students have you heard of? and (c) What biases against Latino students do you think you need to change to improve their academic outcomes?

## **Participants' Perspectives**

### **What Makes Latino Students Academically Successful?**

The first question asks their opinion on what makes a Latino student academically successful. I specifically left this question open to interpretation, as I wanted to see how they interpreted academic success and what they believe makes Latinos successful. My first participant was Linda, a 34-year-old special education Caucasian teacher with 13 years of teaching experience. She stated,

I don't see a difference just because they're Latino necessarily. It's the level of motivation. The kids that are motivated are the ones that do better. And they're generally motivated because their parents care about school, and they maybe feel connected to an adult in the building that also cares about school.

Linda continued,

A lot of parents don't place importance on school, not because they're bad people or because they don't care, but because the house needs to be cleaned, or the other kids need to be taken care of, or whatever. But I don't think that's a racial thing. I think that's just a poverty thing, which a lot of our students experience as well."

From my own teaching experience working with Latino students, I know that sometimes family issues prevent students from going to school every day. I have seen this firsthand. Sadly, babysitting a younger sibling does happen, leading to the older student falling behind. Linda is saying that academics just don't get the time or space in the lives of Latino students that they should. She also emphasized that "When kids bring home a bad grade, no one even opens their backpack to find it. So, there's no feedback from the parent, who might care if their kid is failing." Linda has experience with report cards



being returned to school unopened, which leads her to believe that Latino parents must not care about the report cards because they never even opened them.

Personally, I do not agree with Linda's assessment. Although this same issue happened to me when I was a teacher, some report cards were returned unopened. When I asked the parent why they did not take the time to open the report card, however, they admitted that they were illiterate and could not read in English or Spanish. This is a situation that concerns me about teachers. It worries me that teachers immediately conclude that a parent is not interested in their child's grades because they did not open the report card when, in fact, they may not be able to read. This is not to say that disinterested parents do not exist, because they do, but I wish teachers would stop making snap judgments about their Latino students or any student. The other concern that I have with Linda's assessment of Latino academic success has to do with motivation. She related a student's motivation to do well in school to their parents' interest in academics. This is possible, but I have experience teaching motivated students who did not have family support, yet they persevered.

My next participant is Carole. She is a 47-year-old Caucasian reading specialist with 24 years of teaching experience. Carole also noted that family has an influence on the success of Latino students:

I think a good, solid foundation with their family is needed. I believe that if their family is invested in them, they're going to be invested in the classroom, and I think so much is based on their family because I think that family support gives them the courage to take more risks in the classroom.

Courage is an interesting way to describe successful Latino students, but courage is hard

to teach; maybe it needs to be modeled. Carole opined, “I think that Latino students who are more willing to take risks are going to go farther. I also think those who read at home are also going to go farther.” Carole described the Family Reading Night that her school hosts every year, in which families are invited to come to school on an evening in which teachers have set up cozy reading corners in their classrooms and read stories to students and their siblings while their parents stand by. Carole believes that this event can be used to teach parents how to read to children. She shared,

In my personal opinion, anytime you get a parent into that building, we really need to show them how to read to their kids. It’s more like a “how-to” night instead of a literacy night, almost because I just think that’s our biggest weakness. We need that strong family foundation; I’m not sure the parents know how to do that.

In addition to family support, Carole believes that communication between the parent and the child is a vital—yet underused—activity:

I don’t know how to do this, but to teach them how to just communicate with their kids. That’s so important because even if they didn’t read with their kids every night if they just talked with their kids, I think we would find them more academically successful. Withing those simple conversations, you’re building vocabulary, and that’s what the EL students in my district lack. It’s the everyday vocabulary because nobody’s talking to them.

I wonder how she came to this conclusion. How does she know that Latino parents are not talking to their children at home? I did not want to push Carole to tell me how she knows that Latino parents do not speak with their children because I felt that it might prevent her from sharing other thoughts. I wanted to keep our conversation open and honest. I did not

want to make her feel as though I was judging her answers. I already had a feeling that my questions were causing her some discomfort, so I chose not to push any further.

Jose is a 43-year-old Latino fourth-grade bilingual teacher with 18 years of teaching experience. When I asked Jose what makes Latino students academically successful, I was not surprised by his response because Linda made a similar observation. Jose said,

It's the student who understands how to play the academic game who will be successful. So, you understand the academic vocabulary. You know how to take a test. Usually, all those intrinsic things that nobody teaches you, but some kids just get. It's not necessarily being intelligent; it's not necessarily having higher-order thinking because sometimes just surviving the streets is a lot more cognitively demanding than taking a test. Being good at the academic game, and I don't even know how to put it into words, but it's not intelligence, it's not knowledge, but it's a combination of a lot of things.

Jose also suggested that drive is another factor contributing to the academic success of Latino students. I have noticed that students that do not have a drive and give up easily are not successful. At the same time, however, drive is not the only factor, as some students try before failing. Success does not necessarily have to do with background knowledge because sometimes I see kids with very little background knowledge that become successful at playing the school game, and I have seen kids that sometimes have very different backgrounds that achieve success despite my expectations. Another area that Jose touched on was the home environment: "Having accessibility to a quiet place to sit down and do work, having a safe environment at home. There are so

many, so many different variables.” When I asked him to contemplate deeper on this point, he said, “I mean, there are many different reasons, and you probably have read this a lot more than I do, but the first one is that assessments are biased because they are not designed for the population that they are evaluating.” This is interesting because many educational researchers have been saying this for decades. “But,” Jose added, “Another very real one is that most of the Latino students come from low-income families, and it's a different story.” I agreed with Jose when he asserted:

Parenting is very different when you cannot spend the time to sit down when you're working all the time providing food for your family and shelter. Those values are very America, to sitting down and read with your child every night; that doesn't happen in a Latino family when you have parents working all the time. When they come home, they're exhausted, and the only thing they want to do is just take a bath and go to bed. You need to be cognizant of that too.

Jose distinguished between what Linda and Carole said about Latino families not being engaged with their children; however, he views this same issue differently. Linda states that Latino students would be more successful if their parents cared more about what happens in school and spent more time talking with their children. Carole added that Latino students need more family support and a strong family foundation. It might be essential to note that both of these teachers are not Latina, and maybe this has something to do with how they view Latino students. I say this because Jose, who is Latino, takes a very different view on the same situation.

Jose touches on a critical aspect of poverty and the Latino household. He noted that when parents work long hours, they are tired when they get home, and many do not

have the energy to sit down and read a book to their children. Their energies are focused on providing food and shelter for their families. I remember the time my principal told us at a staff meeting that we as teachers need to come up with solutions and to stop complaining about our students' home life. He also said that we could not control what goes on at home; therefore, we need to develop ways of connecting with our students. I feel like all teachers need to hear this and to follow my old principal's recommendations.

Barbara, a 30-year-old Caucasian ESL teacher with 8 years of teaching experience, answered the question what makes a Latino student academically successful in the following way:

I think they're just like any other student. If they have a strong connection with somebody that really values education then, I think they can be successful. Even if they're not the top of their class or anything else, if somebody in the building really cares about how they're doing then, they're excited to show that person how well they are doing. Or if at home, the parent checks in or want to know how they're doing.

Barbara also stated, "I think just like any other student, if they have somebody that's invested in their academics then, they will be successful." Just like Linda and Carola, Barbara also suggested that parent involvement is a significant factor in the success of Latino students. But my question is, how do these teachers know that parents are not involved? Why do they assume that parents are not involved? Could this be a perceived bias? I have two issues with these statements. First, how do they know that the parents are not checking in to see how their children are doing in school? The second has to do with the definition of involvement. Parental involvement looks different for a White

middle-class family than it does for a low-income Latino family. In working with many Latino families, I know that parents talk to their children about a variety of things. These topics may not always be about school, but communication is key to Latino families.

The next participant was Dela, who describes herself as Mexican, German, and English. She has been teaching middle school ESL classes for over 14 years. Dela believes that resilience can help make a Latino student academically successful. She explained that this is “Because they have to run in both worlds. They have to live in the informal family-centered world and then also in a more academic setting. They have to navigate two realities, like two different cultures.” She continued, “If they’re good at that then, that helps them be more academically successful.” I completely understand what she is talking about. Latino students often speak only Spanish when they go home. In many cases, they do not know academic Spanish. This is an authentic aspect that monolingual students do have to worry about.

Like the others, Maria, who is a 40-year-old Latina ESL teacher with 15 years of teaching experience, also suggested that family can help add to the academic success of a Latino student. Unlike the other participants, who said that Latino families did not have a positive connection to the school, Maria perceives the family as a fundamental asset to the success of Latino students. She asserted,

You know, I think that for Latinos, the family is so important to us, right? So, I think that that is a strength that Latinos bring, wanting to belong to something, right, wanting to feel a part of a family, that kindness they have, where they just want to make sure that everybody’s included. They can recognize when one of

their peers is hurt or is sad about something, and they care. They'll point it out, and they'll want to stop a session until that person is back into the group and engaged again. So, I would say that's a really great strength.

I could not agree more with her assertion about Latino children's willingness to stop the class and wait for the rest to catch up. I saw this firsthand when I was a teacher. My students would often help each other find the correct page or help their classmates on projects; moreover, I noticed that they did this intrinsically. Like Maria suggested, kindness was almost expected. I remember a time when one of my students would say out loud that he did not have a pencil. Within seconds, three or four students would offer him a pencil without even thinking about it and without worrying about whether they would get it back or not. The value placed on sharing and helping each other succeed is immeasurable. This is a facet of Latino culture that Maria and I can identify with because we are both Latinas. We were raised in this culture, and we understand it; however, it saddens me when non-Latino teachers view this aspect of the Latino culture negatively. I remember one of my fourth-grade team teachers complaining to me that her Latino students were cheating. They were not cheating; they were helping each other out. This is a huge blind spot that some White teachers have. I was able to explain what was going on in her classroom, and she was satisfied with my explanation.

The categories that emerged from the predetermined question of what makes Latino students academically successful are as follows:

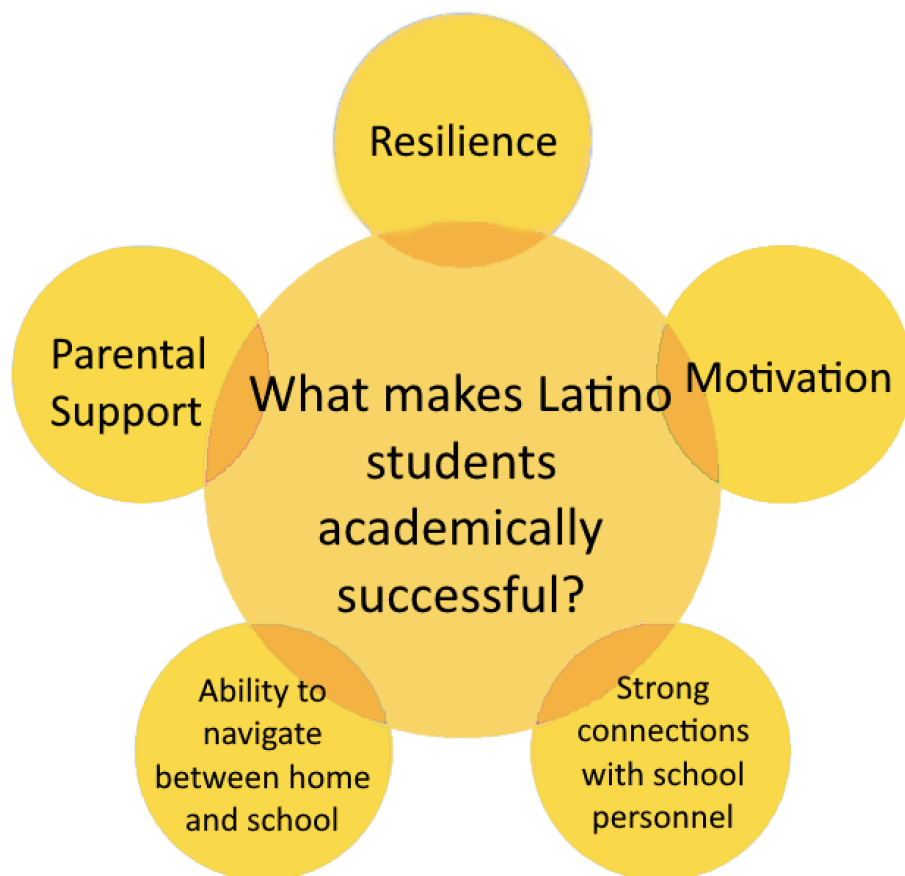
- Resilience
- Motivation
- Parental support

- Ability to navigate between home and school
- Strong connections with school personnel

Below is an illustration that identifies the categories that emerged from the question, what makes Latino students academically successful? Table 5 contains actual quotes from participants as they responded to each question.

**Figure 2**

*What Makes Latino Students Academically Successful?*





**Table 5***Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question*

What Makes Latino students academically successful?	Participant Quotes
Linda	I don't see a difference just because they're Latino necessarily. It's the level of motivation. The kids that are motivated are the ones that do better. And they're generally motivated because their parents care about school, and they feel connected to an adult in the building that also cares about school.
Jose	It's the student who understands how to play the academic game, who will be successful. You need to understand the academic vocabulary. You know how to take a test. It's all those intrinsic things that nobody teaches you, but some kids just get. It's being good at the academic game.
Barbara	I think they're just like any other student. If they have a strong connection with somebody that really values education then, I think they can be successful. Even if they're not the top of their class. If somebody in the building really cares about how they're doing then, they're excited to go show that person how well they are doing.
Dela	Latino students have to run in both worlds. They have to live in the informal family-centered world and then also in a more academic setting. They have to navigate two realities, like two different cultures. If they're good at that then, that will help them be more academically successful.
Carole	I think a good, solid foundation with their family is needed. I think that if their family is invested in them, they're going to be invested in the classroom, and I think so much is based on their family because I think that family support gives them the courage to take more risks in the classroom.
Maria	You know I think that for Latinos, the family is so important to us. So, I think that that is a strength that Latinos bring. They want to belong to something, and feel a part of a family, that kindness they have, where they just want to make sure that everybody's included. They can recognize when one of their peers is hurt or is sad about something, and they care. So, I would say that's a really great strength.

### **What Gets in the Way of Latino Students' Academic Success?**

Now I will discuss the results to the question of what gets in the way of Latino students' academic success? Again, I specifically left this question open to interpretation. In response to this inquiry, Linda stated,

Sometimes I think it's the language, but not for students, for their parents.

Because the students I deal with are all like generation 1.5 or, 2, 3 sometimes, but I think a lot of their families maybe don't read and write in English. And so, they just are like, well, I don't know how to help you. So, they just get dismissed sometimes, which is what the kids tell me. Um, I don't know how much of reality or if that's really true. But I think there isn't any access to our materials sometimes; even though I try to translate as much as I can, it's not the same. I do think that gets in the way.

I got the sense from our interview that Linda tries very hard to reach her students.

Although she is not a Spanish speaker, Linda asserts that she tries to translate as much as she can because she knows that if she translates homework, parents will be able to help their students. One other point that Linda made has to do with students reading and writing in English. She feels that not being able to read and write in English can prevent their academic success. Linda went on to explain that when students don't care about school, they are not going to be successful. She contended,

I think that in the back of their minds, the kids know that what we're talking about in the classroom only matters for these few hours that we are in school, and then they go into a world where it doesn't matter. So, it doesn't sink in because they weren't really trying to absorb it, because they don't care about it.

I remember making these same observations when I was a fourth-grade bilingual teacher. I remember thinking that my students were only putting in the time during school, but not at home. I wonder how much of this is based on the fact that they are Latino students or on the fact that they are fourth-grade students who may not be interested in academics; maybe they are simply not interested because they are 9- and 10-year-olds who would instead be playing outside. Linda went on to say that “success in academics doesn’t matter to their parents in a lot of ways, like with grades, like they don’t get punished.” This statement made me pause. How does Linda know that her students do not have any consequences for getting bad grades? She went on to say that,

It doesn’t matter at school either because we pass them on, or we still let them go to the parties, or we still do whatever. So, what does it matter if I get five Fs or five As? Because I get all the same. I still go to the gym. I still go to art. I still go to lunch. I get recess, hang out with my friends.

I feel the frustration in Linda’s comments. She wants her students to be held accountable for receiving five “Fs.” Still, I do not agree that withholding them from gym or art classes is the correct way to discipline students for receiving unacceptable grades.

When I posed this same question to another teacher participant, Carole, she focused on vocabulary and the family’s lack of communication: “I think it’s the lack of vocabulary, and I think that vocabulary is that missing piece because there’s just not enough communication in their houses. This reminds me of the “blame the victim” mentality that was prevalent in the 1960s. William Ryan of Boston College wrote a brilliant exposé called “Blaming the Victim” in 1972. This book disassembles the myth that minority students perform poorly in school because they are culturally deprived.

Is Carole suggesting that parents do not communicate with their children at home? I find this assertion troublesome. When I was a young child, I remember a lot of conversations taking place in our home. Our discussions were rarely about American academics, but they were rich with stories about my family in Mexico, about how my family immigrated to the United States of America, about how much my parents missed their families back home, and about the struggles of learning to live in a new country. Many teachers fail to see the value of storytelling in the Latino home. I do, however, appreciate the fact that Carole answered the question of what gets in the way of Latino academic from the perspective of a reading specialist, so will naturally consider their reading and vocabulary deficits. Carole said:

I think individuals who struggle academically, most of them can decode, most of them can figure out the words, but they have no clue what they're reading. So, it's really a vocabulary piece, and that's where we have to change our focus and make sure we're addressing those needs, everyday vocabulary, and academic. And I think in the classroom, we do a push for the academic vocabulary. Still, we forget it's the everyday vocabulary they have to have learned first before they can really build and make those connections to the academic. The Latino students and struggling students don't have that So if Latino students don't have the everyday vocabulary, how can they build on their academic vocabulary?

I believe that Latino students can learn every day and academic vocabulary simultaneously. I understand how Carole came to this conclusion, but teachers need to give Latinos more credit for what they can accomplish. They can learn everyday vocabulary and academic vocabulary at the same time.

Carole also believes that lack of communication at home leads to a lack of vocabulary awareness. She stated,

You need to start with just a level of communication, just casual conversations.

When you read every night, it doesn't have to be long, but if you read every night and you're reading a variety of books, you're picking up on different vocabulary.

And I think those two pieces go together to build vocabulary.

I agree with her this assessment; students do increase their vocabulary skills by reading a variety of books. I disagree, however, with her assertion that Latino parents do not communicate enough with their children at home. It's important to note that as long as students are reading at home; it does matter if they are reading in English or Spanish. If a child has not mastered reading; it is beneficial for parents to read to their children—in any language.

Jose had a different view about what gets in the way of the academic success of Latino students. He stated, "There are many different reasons, but the first one is that assessments are biased because they are not designed for the population that they're evaluating." What Jose is talking about here is accurate; significant research exists on this topic. The publishers of wide-scale assessments are trying to make improvements in this area. Jose also added,

But another one, a very real one, is that most of the Latino students come from low-income families, and it's a different story. Parenting is very different when you cannot spend the time to sit down when you're working all the time providing food for your family and shelter. Those values are very America, like sitting down and reading with your child every night. That doesn't happen in a Latino family

when you have parents working all the time.

Jose continued, “When they come home, they’re exhausted, and the only thing they want to do is just take a bath and go to bed. You need to be cognizant of that too.” I agree with Jose’s thought on what gets in the way of Latino academic success. During parent-teacher conferences, I remember parents telling me that sometimes they did not see their children until the weekends because they left for work before their children woke up and returned after they were in bed; reading a bedtime story is out of the question in these situations.

Barbara was the only teacher that cited politics as a possible factor that gets in the way of the academic success of Latino students. She mentioned that TV news was adding stress to the lives of her students, specifically the 2016 elections. I remember my whole class was so worried that Trump was going to be president.” Barbra recalled,

So, I was teaching kindergarten in 2016, and even those kindergarteners knew if Trump takes office, our families could be deported. They were scared. And that was kindergarten. So, politics can have a huge impact on that. And when adults that they care about are saying things like, “Yeah, we should build a wall,” “Yeah, we should deport all of these people.” It makes them feel unsafe. It makes them feel not valued. It makes them feel like why even try in school if people think this poorly of me.

Barbara is making a connection between how society thinks about Mexican people in general, and how this perception can have a negative effect on school children. Students have heard messages that they are not welcomed in this country. A teacher may not say these messages out loud, but Latino students hear them clearly via TV news, social media. Barbara suggested that teachers have biases: “Sometimes, I watch them turn around and

talk to the students. And I'm like do you realize you're talking to that one differently just because they speak Spanish"? I asked her to give me an example of how teachers speak differently to Latino students. She answered:

Just the way that, like I said, how they have lower expectations for them. Like, oh, well, they're EL, so whatever. Or they see the other kid come up and show the work to the teacher. And the teacher is like, "Oh, that's so great. Or how about you add this, or how about you add that." And then, the Latino student comes up, and the teacher is like, "Yeah, okay 'that looks good.' And they're kind of like, well, how can I make it better? Teachers respond by saying, 'Yeah, it's good enough.'

I asked Barbara why she thinks some teachers have lower expectations from Latino students. She answered, "I think sometimes, it's not necessarily coming from a bad place. I think they're trying to do good and just be like oh, they're doing their best, and it's fine." I asked her if she thought that maybe teachers had lower expectations subconsciously. She responded, "Yeah, and I think sometimes, they actually do have some sort of bias, or maybe they are voting for people who want to deport them and stuff like that. And they don't really want to teach them." I was impressed with Barbara's honest response to this challenging question and her ability to freely express her thoughts. As we continued to discuss teachers' perceptions of Latino students, Barbara stated,

I think more often, it's just kind of like, well, that's good enough to lower expectations, which is sad. And I think it happens with special ed kids, too. A lot of times, it's like, oh, they're sped. So that's good enough. That's all we're going to get from them. And I think the two groups really are grouped together a lot.

She went on to describe how some teachers arrange their students into ability groups, like high kids, middle kids, EL, and special education kids. She added that some teachers dismiss Spanish-speaking students by saying, “well, they speak another language.”

Barbara’s expertise in bilingual education has allowed her to honor the fact that many Spanish-speaking students are bilingual and biliterate. She stated that “some students know twice as many words as teachers and therefore, schools should probably not put them with the special education classrooms.” This reminded me of the time when I was an assistant principal, and I asked a special education teacher to stop giving a fifth-grade student coloring pages to complete while the rest of the class was doing fifth-grade work. Although she was an experienced special education teacher, I had to remind her how to differentiate. Barbara added that Spanish-speaking students have twice the vocabulary of monolingual students. They may not know how to say apple, but they know that *manzana* means “apple” in Spanish. So, once they learn the word apple, they will have two vocabulary words for one item. Barbara said, “For some reason, teachers think that if they have trouble speaking, maybe they have trouble learning.”

Dela gave a very insightful response to the question of what gets in the way of the academic success of Latino students. She noted that according to Pearson, one of the largest publishers of the school curriculum in the United States, Latino students need more background knowledge in order to be successful. From an academic lens, Latino students lack the background knowledge and experiences that the traditional curriculum expects them to have. In addition to this response, Dela also shared how some teachers blame the Latino family for their child’s lack of academic success. She stated that,

I’ll get lots of people hating and saying things like, they go into the city and visit



their family, and they're there all weekend. And they come back late. And it's because family is more important to them than being on time on Monday morning.

I remember teachers telling me this exact same thing. Dela explained,

So, even my cousin would pull his kids out of school for 6 weeks every year to go to Mexico to visit their family. So, they missed 6 weeks of the school year every single year their entire education; they graduated high school. They're fine. They're academically successful, but not every kid can recover from that. If your natural abilities are fine and the connections you have with the school are fine, then this should not be a problem.

With my 14 years of teaching experience, I can attest that some Mexican families take their children out of school for an extended period while they visit family in Mexico. But most of the time, they asked me for homework so their child would not fall behind. I believe that teachers fail to see the importance that Latino families place on the family. Parents want their children to be successful, but at the same time, they want them to maintain generational ties to their families in Mexico. They try to make the best of their situation.

Maria had a very different response when asked what gets in the way of the academic success of a Latino student. Maria said, "So, it's funny because I've thought about this before. One of the things that I think is a strength, in terms of their cultural experiences, can also be what gets in the way of their academic success." Maria had this to say about Latino families:

For example, when you're young, you're taught this idea or this notion where you

have to be humble, and you shouldn't speak up. Even if you know something, you shouldn't say it. Allow someone else to do it. It's sort of passive or something that's just learned, and it's something that isn't explicitly taught, but it's just cultural. It's something within.

When I think of the times when I visit Mexico to see my family and my cousins, I notice that the culture is just so different; it is all about kindness and community.

Rothstein-Fisch and Trumbull (2008) wrote about how to build on students' cultural strengths in their book, *Managing Diverse Classrooms*: "In Mexico, a highly collectivist country, the dominant values are interdependence, family unity, modesty, respect, and social development" (p. 10). Maria added,

It's not that you have to be mean here in the U.S. or anything, but there's more of an aggressive culture here. If you want to be successful, you can't just sit in the corner and be quiet. You have to be actively engaged and participating and speaking up, and if you want to have a seat at the table, you have to express your ideas. You can't just sit there and nod and be okay with that. So, I really think that's something that is detrimental for Latino students.

I have never really thought about what Maria is saying here, but it makes a lot of sense. Some Latino students would rather let somebody else shine because they are taught intrinsically to be humble and pleasing. Just like Maria, I also remember visiting my family in Mexico when I was young. My cousins wanted to please us because we were the visitors and their guests. Providing a welcoming environment to guests in your home is the ultimate respect you can give visitors. I remember feeling a bit odd when we were given so much attention and respect. I was not used to this level of

attention even though I was being raised by Mexican parents, and we were living in the United States, where social norms are so different.

As a young child, I remember going to my friends' houses and being surprised at how relaxed and casual their families were. They never offered me anything to drink or eat. This would be a major faux pas in a Latino household. My friend's parents would say things like, "Go get your own juice from the refrigerator." At that time, I thought they were so rude; I did not realize that this was normal behavior for some American families. Maria added, "The other piece in terms of thinking of the families and the parents, I think that Latino parents have a lot of trust in teachers." She gave an example of how Mexican parents think, "Okay, I'm going to take my child to school, and then I'm entrusting that you're going to do what's right for my child, and you're the professional. So, I'm trusting that you know what's right for them."

She added that this is not always the case with every teacher. I agree with Maria because I remember explaining this exact same thing to other teachers when I was a teacher. I had to explain that many Latino parents entrust us as teachers to be the leader and know what is best because we went to college to be a teacher. Maria recalled a time when she first started teaching:

I realized that when I first started teaching in O.P. the American parents were very vocal. I was teaching fourth grade at the time, and I just remember that the culture in O. P. was very different. Maybe because they pay very high taxes, they felt entitled. It's not that they were rude or anything like that or attacking or anything, but they were just always questioning things. And if you gave them a good explanation, they were fine with it. They didn't have a problem. But I just realized

like wow, just the mere fact that they questioned because they want to get a clear understanding, that's something that our families don't do. And I think that's something that they need to be doing so that they can get a better understanding.”

She went on to say that Latino parents need to be able to advocate for their children because once they have a better understanding, they will know if this class is a right fit for their child.

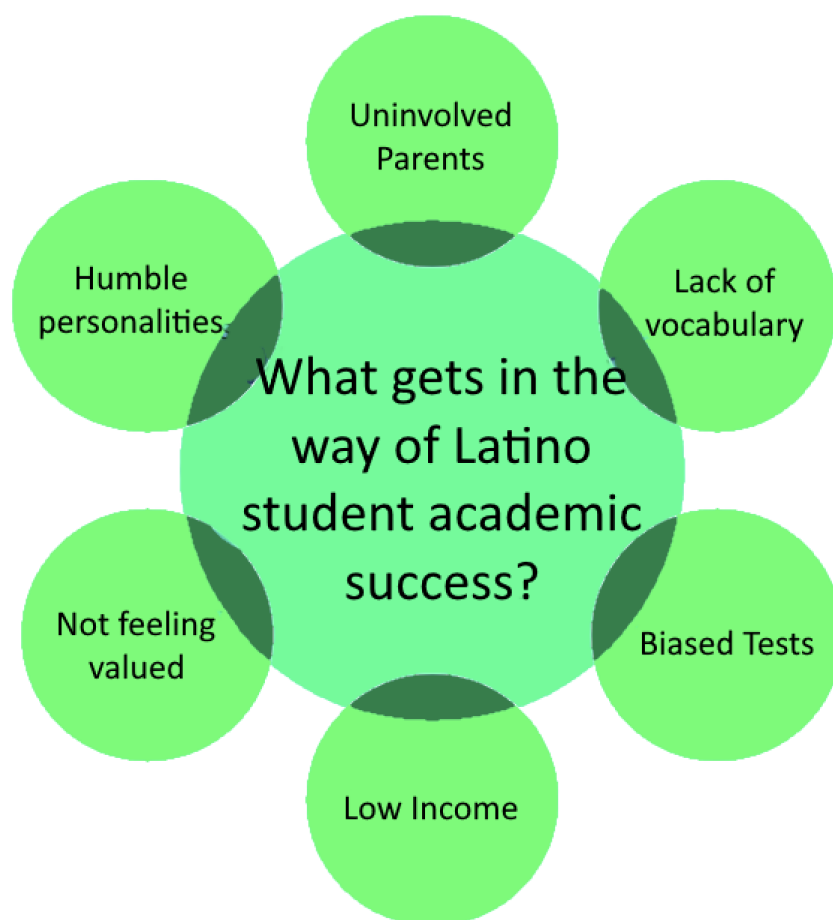
Below is an illustration that identifies the categories that emerged from the question, what gets in the way of Latino academic success? The categories that emerged from the predetermined question of what gets in the way of Latino students' academic success are as follows:

- Uninvolved parents
- Humble personalities
- Lack of Vocabulary
- Not feeling valued
- Low Income
- Biased Tests

Below is an illustration that identifies the categories that emerged from the question, what gets in the way of Latino students academically successful? Table 6 contains actual quotes from participants as they responded to each question.

**Figure 3**

*What Gets in the Way of Latino Student Academic Success?*



**Table 6***Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question*

What gets in the way of Latino student academic success?	Participant Quotes
Linda	Sometimes I think it's the language, but not for students, for their parents. I think a lot of their families maybe don't read and write in English. And so, they don't know how to help. So, they just get dismissed sometimes, which is what the kids tell me.
Jose	There are many different reasons, but the first one is that assessments are biased because they are not designed for the population that they're evaluating.
Barbara	Back in 2016 even my kindergarteners knew that if Trump takes office, our families could be deported. They were scared. So, politics can have a huge impact on them. And when adults that they care about are saying things like, 'Yeah, we should build a wall.' 'Yeah, we should deport all of these people.' It makes them feel unsafe. It makes them feel not valued. It makes them feel like why even try in school if people think this poorly of me.
Dela	Some teachers blame the Latino family for their child's lack of academic success. I'll get lots of people hating, and saying things like, 'they go into the city and visit their family and they're there all weekend. And they come back late. But it's because family is more important to them than being on time on Monday morning.
Carole	I think it's the lack of vocabulary, and I think that vocabulary is that missing piece because there's just not enough communication in their houses. The Latino students don't have that. So, if they don't have the everyday vocabulary, how can they build on their academic vocabulary?
Maria	One of the things that I think is a strength, in terms of their cultural experiences, can also be what gets in the way of their academic success. For example, when you're young you're taught this idea or this notion where you have to be humble and you shouldn't speak up. Even if you know something, you shouldn't say it. Allow someone else to do it. It's sort of passive or something that's just learned and it's just cultural. It's something within.

### **What Can Latino Students Do to Improve Their Academic Success?**

After learning what my participants cited as issues that get in the way of the academic success of Latino students, I will now discuss their answers to the question, what can Latino students do to improve their academic success? I really wanted to see how the participants felt about Latino students and whether or not they could identify subconscious biases about them. I wanted to see how they viewed their role in the academic success of Latino students. Linda focused on the fact that Latino students need to learn how to ask for extra help. She stated, “I think our school offers a lot of access to extra programs and technology that they could take advantage of, and they don’t. For extra practice, we have things like Fact Practice, IXL websites that help fill in some of those gaps.” Linda also suggested that “students could be doing that stuff at home.” She explained, “All these kids have phones. They could stay after school in the library and get help.” She added that she is always willing to work with students during their lunch time, but they rarely want to stay in for lunch recess: “So, I think that teaching kids to be self-advocates, and admit when they don’t know something and work until they get it, is a skill set that all students can benefit from, including Latino students.”

Linda discussed a book that her principal asked all teachers to read last year. The book is called *Growth Mindset*. This book promotes the idea that all students have the ability to learn. Linda is not a fan of this book; in fact, she said, “I hate the Growth Mindset. Just for the record, I think the Growth Mindset is a big joke.” The book suggests that teachers need to adopt the mindset that learning is a continuum and that they should explain to students that they have not learned something “yet.” In other words, they should encourage students to keep going and not to give up. Linda does not believe in

this because she believes that students need to be self-motivated. She believes that teachers should be “teaching students to be self-advocates and to let us know when they need help.” Linda thinks that they should, “staying in the moment long enough to understand when they do and do not know something because the students are not focused enough to even know that they don’t know something. The last comment was said with great frustration in her voice. I wonder if teaching special education for as long as she has may be tainting her view of students. I do not hear empathy in her voice or her comments. This was made clear to me when she said, “They are five grade levels behind and have such a limited awareness of how behind they are. You know, because everyone gives them good grades or lets them pass.” Linda began to shake her head in disagreement with the notion of giving students good grades when they do not try hard. It is almost like she feels they do not deserve the grades they receive. Then she said,

I tell the parents; your child is reading at a kindergarten level going to fifth grade.

Like, those are conversations I have with the students. The fact that you only read like three-letter words, you’re not in a good place.

I asked Linda if she thought that her students needed to be aware of how they compare to their peers. She answered,

So, in comparison to the work the students are being asked to do, you realize that they will continue to be praised if you don’t talk to them. So, like, when they’re in fourth grade, I tell them, you can’t do any of the work in our classroom without my help. We have to get you to a place where you can take this paper and do it on your own. And until they get there, they’re not in a good place, and they have to work harder. You just have to work harder. Those are things I tell them all the



time.

Linda's frustration was palpable. She truly believes that her students need to know that they are very far behind their peers. She was basically angry with the fact that other teachers do not hold them accountable for being so far behind. I question if her expectations are reasonable. Her students are not general education students. Her students have cognitive delays, and therefore, they are not reading at a grade level.

I was glad that Jose's answer to the question of what Latino students can do to improve their academic success did not put all the responsibility of success on students. He said, "I think it's hard just to put it on the students themselves. At the elementary level, I think they're too young to do much." Jose also discussed how Latino students could use technology to improve their academic success. He said,

Now, if there were some sort of independent computer game or something like that that wouldn't require assistance, to help them develop those basic skills, that would be great. But the problem is the more time they're with a device, the less time they have to interact with other people. So, that makes it a lot harder. To me, it will probably be to make the kids more engaged in the family dynamics.

Jose brought up an interesting suggestion:

So, if you're going to the grocery store, take the child and have them help you choose what you're buying and explain why you are buying this and not that. Parents can work math into shopping at the grocery store and help them budget their stuff and make them more part of the process in the house. Maybe that could help them become better students academically speaking.

Jose did not say much besides having parents teach their children how to use math

in the grocery store. He was not willing to put the burden of being academically successful squarely on the students themselves.

Just like Linda had mentioned, Barbara also suggested that students need to ask for help. She said,

I think it's the same as their peers, and that is to try harder, to just try really hard, to work really hard to reach out to find help, to really try to get help from their teacher or find another adult in the school that they connect with.

Barbara also suggested that Latino students should also reach out to their peers who also speak Spanish to help them depending on how much English they have. Like Jose, Barbara was unwilling to put the entire burden of being academically successful on Latino students themselves. Interestingly, both Jose and Barbara believe that other factors play a much more significant role in the academic success of Latino students.

Dela was quite reflective about this question because she immediately commented on the fact that she only has a short time with her students each day. Her nonverbal communication made it clear to me that she was uncomfortable with this question. Dela paused for a long time before she answered. Her facial expressions looked as though she was worried or concerned. She said, "This is hard because I'm focusing a lot on the things that I can't control and the outside influences. I can only control about 20 percent of the time that I see them." I rephrased this question and asked her to think about her entire education career and try to remember when a student was academically successful and to tell me what that student was like. This approach made more sense to her, and she responded,

When they were able to achieve higher levels of academic English, they were

curious, and they were readers. They were interested in learning more about the world and sought that out on their own. They were very intrinsically motivated. And one of the things I noticed is that some of my long-term ELL kids have internalized the 'I'm not good at school' belief, which is hard. I'm just not good at it. I'm just not good at school.' There are some kids who are very smart who have a terrible self-image. They're not able to be as successful in school, even though they have a lot of natural ability. But on the other hand, there are other kids that find that school is hard for them, but they work really hard, and they practice. Dela added that "knowing how to study and knowing how they learn better, is one of those really big key things, too, that helps those kids be more successful. They need to be able to persevere." It is important to note that Dela works with middle school students. When she stated that her students feel like they are not good enough, I wonder if this is due to being a preteen middle school students and not necessarily to be a minority student. When I worked with middle school students a few years ago, I often heard them saying things like, "Nobody likes me" or "Everybody hates me!" Middle school can be an awkward stage for most students.

When I asked Carole to share her thoughts on what Latino students can do to improve their academic success, she said they need to read more and have more life experiences. In addition, they need to be more confident: "I would tell them to participate more in class, even as scary and frightening as that is, and then to read a variety of books." She shared that her own daughter loves to read a specific book series, and she will constantly read the same series over and over again, which is great because she's reading every night. She also shared that she told her daughter that she needs to expand

her book interest. She told her daughter,

It's wonderful that you found a series that you like, but I need you to be exposed to different vocabulary, different situations. So, yes, read that series, but then the next thing you need to read has got to be something different so that we can just kind of build and then let's go back and reread it again. I don't want to take away the joy.

I'm just trying to build upon what she has.

Carole feels that the more that they read and the more topics that they read, the more this will help them. She explains that, because Latino students who live in an environment where there is not as much communication and experiences and where they do not go to as many different places because of the time, and that families do not know about; this is how those initial the foundation gets built, and one of those things that can kind of hurt those Latino students. I find it troubling that once again, she is saying that Latino kids do not get enough communication at home and do not visit too many places and that this can even hurt the Latino students. So not going to the museum can hurt them, but what about the fact that they go to rodeos and flea markets and learn how to haggle and learn about racing and other issues that are not academic? Doesn't that count as real-life experiences? Carole explained,

I think that it also takes confidence; you have to be a confident student to be able to say and to start a conversation. And I think sometimes those ELL students are just not as confident with taking those risks.

I wonder why the EL students are not as confident at taking risks at school as answering a question? They probably have a conscience or unconscioned understanding that they are perceived as inferior, and therefore lack the confidence to speak up and give

answers or initiate conversations. Carole believes that they lack confidence and therefore do not speak up in class. There could be a multitude of reasons why they do not speak up in class, but one of the most notable reasons can be because they are shy about speaking English. Some students learning to speak English refuse to talk until their English is perfect. Some students want to avoid making mistakes in front of their peers. Maria gave a similar answer as Carole:

I think that aside from being actively engaged, just always asking questions, they really need to understand that the purpose of school is to help them learn, but it's also to teach them how to be learners. Because it's not just, 'Okay, here's this information. I want you to memorize this or learn this' but it's also more about the strategies, right, learning the strategies so that as they continue with their own schooling and they get to college, they'll be successful because they know how to be a learner. So, really, for me, elementary school is about learning how to be a learner, how to learn those strategies, learning how to study, how to question things, and I think that's what would make them successful.

I agree with Maria's comments, but I wonder why this is not already happening in elementary school. Maria sounded like this is a novel strategy when, in fact, teachers should be teaching students how to learn, not just what to learn. Below is an illustration that identifies the categories that emerged from the question of what Latino students can do to improve their academic success. The categories that emerged from the predetermined question of what Latino students can do to improve their academic success are as follows:

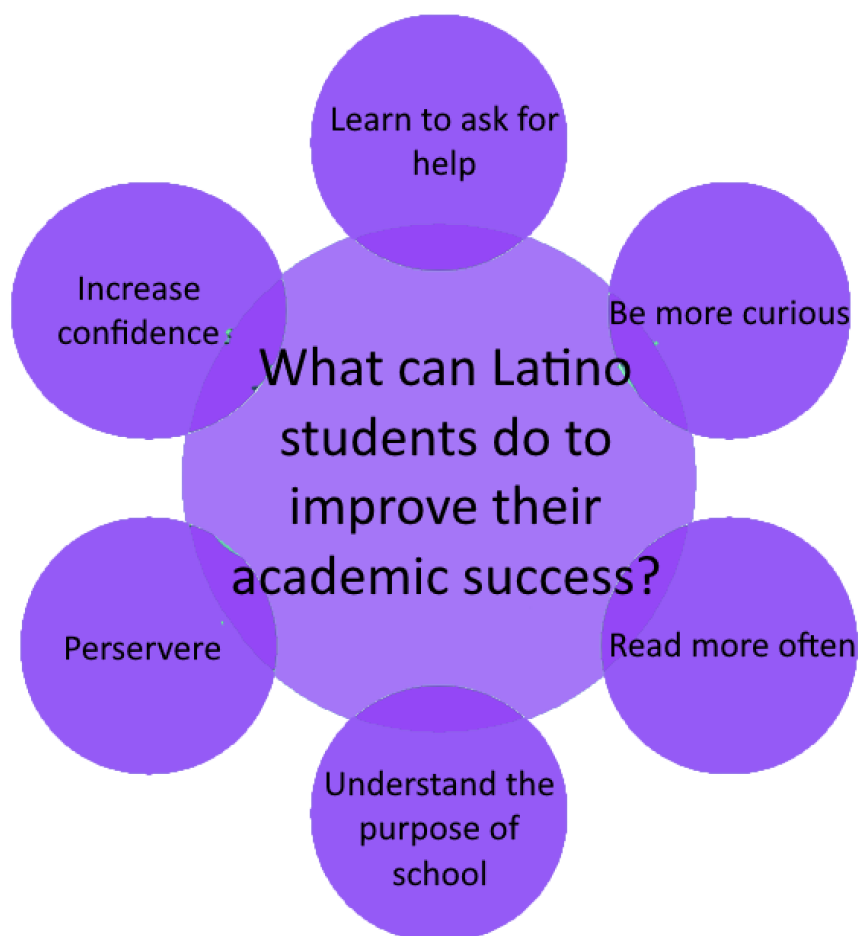
- Learn to ask for help

- Be more curious
- Read more often
- Understand the purpose of school
- Persevere
- Increase confidence

Figure 4 below illustrates the categories that emerged from this question. Table 7 contains actual quotes from participants as they responded to each question.

**Figure 4**

*What Can Latino Students Do to Improve Their Academic Success?*



**Table 7**

*Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question*

What can Latino students do to improve their academic success?	Participant Quotes
Linda	Latino students need to learn how to ask for extra help. I think our school offers a lot of access to extra programs and technology that they could take advantage of, and they don't. They could stay after school in the library and get help.
Jose	I think it's hard just to put it on the students themselves. At the elementary level, I think they're too young to do much.
Barbara	I think that they need to try harder, to just try really hard, to work really hard, to reach out to find help, to really try to get help from their teacher or find another adult in the school that they connect with.
Dela	Latino students who were able to achieve higher levels of academic English, are curious, and they are readers. They are interested in learning more about the world and seek that out on their own. They are very intrinsically motivated. They need to be able to persevere.
Carole	They need to read more and have more life experiences, and they need to be more confident. I would tell them to participate more in class, even as scary and frightening as that is, and then to read a variety of books.
Maria	I think that aside from being actively engaged, just always asking questions, they really need to understand that the purpose of school is to help them learn, but it's also to teach them how to be learners

### **What Can Teachers Do to Improve the Academic Success of Latino Students?**

Now that my participants have voiced their opinions on what they think Latino students need to do in order to improve their academic success, I asked them to share

their thoughts on what they believe teachers can do to improve the academic success of their Latino students. Linda believes that teachers need to hold Latino students to a higher standard. I agree with this assertion. She said,

I think holding a higher standard, and push the kids to get there and don't let them get away with mediocrity. When they turn in junk work that doesn't have a single capital letter, don't accept it. When the paper is backward or crooked or messy, don't accept it. Like, it's not good enough. Like, if you want to get an A, you have to earn an A. And teachers need to work with them. Don't just say that's not good enough, but offer to help them at lunch.

Linda believes that teachers need to hold Latino students accountable and not let them get away with mediocracy. She explained,

Some students get really mad about it. And I'm like, go ahead, be mad. This shows me that you don't care. And why would I give you a good grade, and why should I care and look at that when you're showing me that you don't even care what I think of you. Because when I see this, I think this is a kid who doesn't know anything. I know you understand where capital letters go, but you're giving me this? I see anger sometimes initially from kids that have never been given that kind of feedback.

Eventually, her students fix the mistakes, and they do not need to be told again to improve their errors. She indicated, "After a week, they're like well, she's not going to take it. So, I've got to fix it." She explained that sometimes you have to make your boss happy, much like I have to make my bosses happy. So, sometimes you have to do things that make the teacher happy." It appears that Linda holds penmanship and grammar to a high standard, as all teachers should. Once again, I could sense the frustration and almost



anger in Linda's voice as she described her students. Just like Linda had talked about the need for teachers to hold Latino students to higher standards, Jose also focused on how teachers treat Latino students. He maintained that,

There's nothing new in teaching. So, it's not like something has come out that will change teaching; good teaching is good teaching. But having high expectations is probably the biggest thing. If you expect your students to perform, they will. So, that is probably the number one thing. You can't go thinking they can't do it because you know what, it will happen.

I explained that when teachers believe that their students are incapable of success, the research calls this deficit thinking. Jose also noted that many times teachers believed in the "*pobresito*" mentality. This is loosely translated to "poor little thing" in Spanish. Jose reflected that teachers often believe that Latino students cannot help themselves and therefore, need to be treated like "*pobresitos*."

Jose insisted that "you can't do this. He revealed that "Sometimes I am a little tough on my students because I tell them like, I understand this is happening, and it sucks, but you know what? we need to overcome it." At this point, Jose began to explain how Educational Consultants and Research Associates (ECRA), a data collection tool, has improved his outlook on teaching. Every year, the school district collects reading data beginning in the third grade. Principals and teachers use this data to make improvements to their teaching strategies to achieve higher readings scores. English language learners across school districts tend to score lower than their peers because English is not their first language, and they need time to catch up. Jose explained that because his students are learning English, his overall classroom scores were significantly lower than the scores

of the monolingual classrooms. This was true for my students when I taught fourth grade as well. Jose explained that ECRA has allowed him to see growth in his students' reading scores. He stated, "ECRA has been a game-changer because it really has shown how much improvement I've made as a teacher, and now his class no longer has the worst scores in every assessment." He went on to explain that,

After having ECRA and knowing that my bilingual class is achieving more than is expected year-after-year-after-year has been, for me, really reassuring that what I'm doing is the right thing even though they're still behind their peers.

Jose added that he is happy to see growth, but it still bothers him that a big gap still exists between his students and their peers. He said, "We are still behind, but they're a little closer than when they started with me." I could see that he wants his students to be farther along, so I asked him not to beat himself up because, as the research says, it takes 5 to 7 years for students to really catch up to their peers.

Making connections with your students is what Barbara believes teachers need to do to help their Latino students become academically successful. She suggests that

Teachers who maybe don't know what their cultural background is required to look it up and find out more and ask them specifically, or reach out to their parents and say, "Hey, I want to know more about your culture and what kind of foods you eat and what kind of holidays do you celebrate." And just try to make that connection and make them feel comfortable and safe. I think that if they can see their own culture or at least know that the teacher is trying to make a connection to their culture, I think that can make a huge impact.

I think Barbara is referring to culturally responsive pedagogy, which has been around for

over 20 years, but many school districts have not adopted many school districts as of yet.

Dela expressed a more holistic view regarding the issue of what teachers can do to improve the academic success of Latino students. She shared her dissatisfaction with the Pearson curriculum and how following a prescribed curriculum can hinder teachers' creativity. She described her first teaching experience and how the science curriculum that all teachers were using would be the answer to improving test scores. She stated,

When I first got hired, I was like, oh, if we just use the science part of education and we use all of these scripted programs that are scientifically proven to raise your blah, blah, blah, that will fix everyone. And that doesn't work.

Dela is more interested in teacher's willingness to understand their student's cultural backgrounds. She stated, "I think teachers need to be aware of cultural relevance, culture competency, understanding their home and making our assignments and our reading passages and our topics relevant to them and their lives." Her answer is fascinating to me because this is exactly what Ladson-Billings (2000) and Gay (2002) wrote about in their work. I asked Dela if she had seen any teachers teaching this way. She replied,

I've taught in many places so; I've seen lots of different teaching styles. I've seen some teachers who are very good at accommodating their linguistic needs to help them access the regular grade-level content. But I think that's a battle we're still fighting. We are trying to get away from Pearson, where teachers can only use a certain story. So, the kids read that story. And if you don't do that, you can kind of get in trouble. So, it takes teachers to be willing to push that boundary in order to

break away from the script.

Dela went on to tell me that she has seen some teachers use culturally relevant books for the read-aloud time. She shared that some teachers will put on work music while the kids are working, while other teachers play standard Christmas carols. This is what they listen to in November and December. The idea of playing Christmas music in the classroom during November and December is troubling to Dela because 20 percent of the school population is Asian. I also find this to be troubling. I believe that by 2021, teachers should be more aware of the students who are sitting right in front of them, and they should think twice before playing Christmas carols because not everyone is Christian.

For the question of what teachers can do to improve the academic success of Latino students, Carole, once again, answered this question from a reading specialist lens, which is not a bad thing. Still, it continues to be a narrow look at the academic success of Latino students. She suggested that teachers need to “Do as much explicit vocabulary instruction as possible.” She also added,

I think the teachers need to provide activities where these kids are talking with each other. All of those bi-literacy strategies that we learned were essential, and it’s just like sitting there and participating. I loved participating in that because it was this reminder like, “Well, duh. I can’t talk the entire time and expect my kids to get their language.” They have to talk; they have to speak. They have to utilize the vocabulary.

Carole explained that,

Last summer, I was trained on what’s called Thinking Maps, and it’s a research-based system of different graphic organizers, and you only use these graphic

organizers to teach different skills, and it doesn't matter the subject. You utilize the same language, you utilize the same format in social studies as you do in reading, but thinking maps are geared for EL students, and I got to witness this last year with one of my small groups because what I did is, I tied in my fluency articles with a thinking map.

She used one of the thinking maps to read a fluency article about waves. Her students used one of the thinking maps called a circle map, where they brainstorm what they know about waves. Carole was astonished to learn that this was a great way to adapt her teaching to serve her EL students better. Carole said that she almost started to tear up because "This is exactly the purpose of thinking maps. These are the opportunities that ELL students need the most." Once again, I can see that Carole was answering the question of what Latino students can do to improve their academic success through the lens of a reading specialist; however, I still believe this is a narrow view of a greater issue because teachers need to take a more holistic view of their students. By recognizing her students' cultural differences, Carole might be able to incorporate different strategies to help them achieve.

Maria, the ESL teacher, meets with her students only a few times throughout the week, so she has a different perspective on this question. She stated,

Once again, I think this comes with just being an EL teacher; I think that scaffolding is so important, meeting every student where they're at and not just assuming that everyone is at the same place and that you can just start from one point and move on because I think a lot of teachers do that. I understand that they have a lot of kids in their classroom, right, so that's where they rely on people like me to help fill in some of those gaps. But even with people like me, it's really

hard because we're not in the classroom all day long, so there are only so many gaps that we can fill, right?

Maria also said that "When I go in to pull my students out for 30 minutes, I mean there's no way I can fill every single gap that that student has." Maria feels like the general education teachers rely too much on her, the ESL teacher, to bring the EL students up to grade level when the general-education teacher should be providing scaffolding and other strategies to help her EL students. Maria also said that "I think that classroom teachers need to realize that they have some responsibility and not think that they are 'Maria's students' and she's going to take care of them." She emphasized that general education teachers need to identify who the struggling students are and provide them with strategies to make them more successful. Maria added that general education teachers need to be able to ask questions like, "How can I help them? What can I do while they're with me here in the classroom to support them and to scaffold this information for them?"

I asked Maria if she thought that general education teachers are supporting Latino students in their classrooms. She replied,

No. I think maybe some are better at it than others, but I do think that some still sort of having that idea of, 'Oh, well, that student has an IEP, so the resource teacher is going to help that student' or 'Oh, yeah, well that's one of the EL kids, so Maria is going to work with that student.' And obviously, of course, I'm going to support my students, not that I'm not, but I would just like that mindset to be changed and to realize like, no, this student is all of our students. This is a student like any other student in your class. If they're struggling with something, help them. Yeah, they're your kid too.

I sensed that Maria had had a lot of experience with teachers who simply sent the student to meet with her and neglect their responsibility to teach that student appropriately. The categories that emerged from the predetermined question of what teachers can do to improve the academic success of Latino students are as follows:

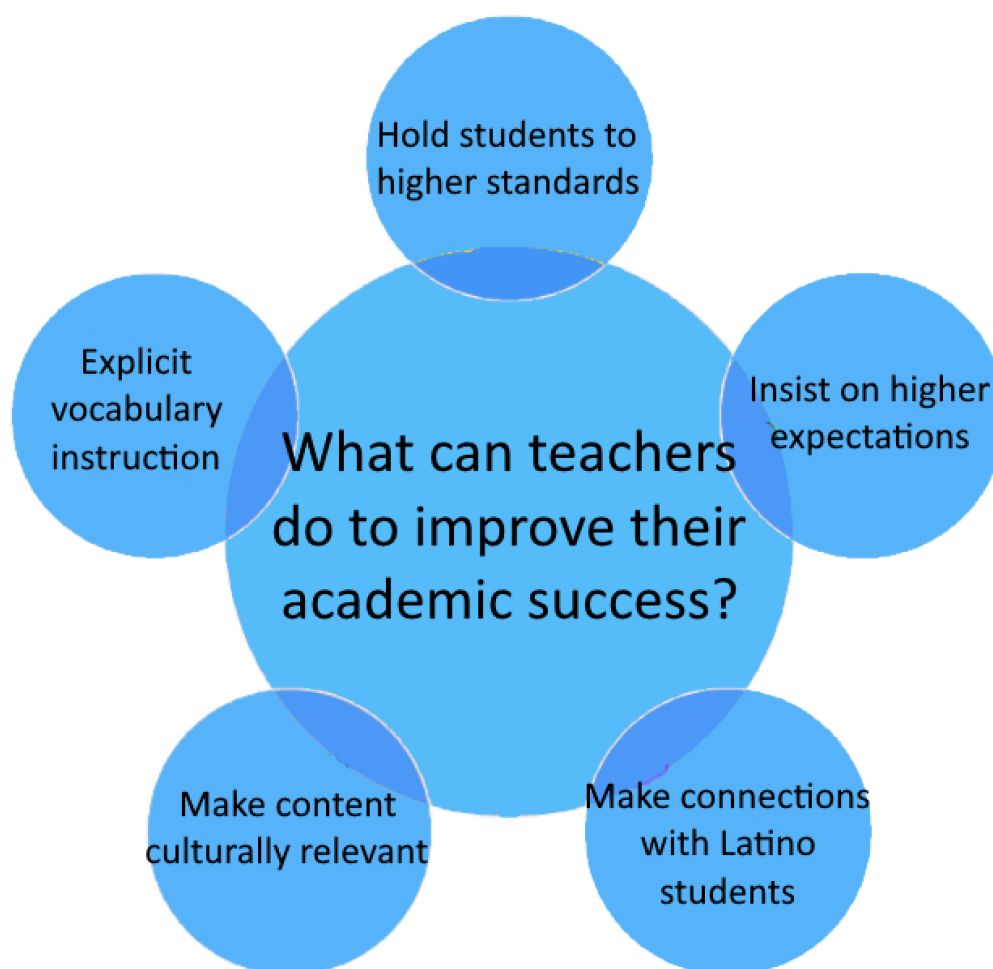
- Hold students to higher standards
- Explicit vocabulary instruction
- Insist on higher expectations
- Make content culturally relevant
- Make connections with Latino students

Below, Figure 5 is an illustration that identifies the categories that emerged from the question, what can teachers do to improve the academic success of Latino students?

Table 8 contains actual quotes from participants as they responded to each question.

**Figure 5**

*What Can Teachers Do to Improve Their Academic Success?*





**Table 8***Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question*

What can teachers do to improve the academic success of Latino students?	Participant Quotes
Linda	I think, hold a higher standard, and push the kids to get there, and don't let them get away with mediocrity. When they turn in junk work that doesn't have a single capital letter, don't accept it. And teachers need to work with them. Don't just say that's not good enough, but offer to help them.
Jose	There's nothing new in teaching. Good teaching is good teaching. But having high expectations is probably the biggest thing. If you expect your students to perform, they will. So, that is probably the number one thing. You can't go thinking they can't do it because you know what, it will happen.
Barbara	Teachers who maybe don't know their cultural background need to look it up and find out more and ask them specifically, or reach out to their parents. And just try to make that connection and make them feel comfortable and safe. I think if they can see their own culture or at least know that the teacher is trying to make a connection to their culture, I think that can make a huge impact.
Dela	I think teachers need to be aware of cultural relevance, cultural competency, understanding their home, and making our assignments and our reading passages and our topics relevant to them and their lives.
Carole	Teachers need to do as much explicit vocabulary instruction as possible. I also think teachers need to provide activities where these kids are talking with each other.
Maria	I think that scaffolding is so important, meeting every student where they're at and not just assuming that everyone is at the same place and that you can just start from one point and move on because I think a lot of teachers do that. I think that classroom teachers need to realize that they have some responsibility and not think that the ESL teacher is going to take care of them.

### **What Can Schools Do to Improve the Academic Success of Latino Students?**

Up to this point, I have discussed the questions of what makes a Latino student academically successful, what gets in the way of their academic success, what Latino students can do to improve their academic success, and what teachers can do to improve the academic success of Latino students. I will now present the participants' suggestions of what schools can do to improve the academic success of Latino students.

Linda had a lot to say about what schools can do to improve the academic success of Latino students. To begin with, she said that schools need to hire more Latino teachers because "I think kids need to see themselves in their educators." She also believes that schools need to have higher standards and need to appreciate their students' culture. Linda began talking about the author Ron Clark, his books, and the movie that was made about the school he started in Atlanta Georgia. Linda said,

One of the educators that I look up to most is Ron Clark; he started his career in Harlem. I'm obsessed with him. He worked in the inner city of New York, in Harlem, where he taught almost exclusively African American students with histories of behavior problems and no academic success and all that kind of stuff. In the movie, it showed how he connected with his students and how he tried to learn double Dutch and do different things that meant something to the kids

During this part of the interview, I could see the excitement in Linda's eyes when she spoke about Ron Clark. At one point in her life, Linda had the chance to visit the school that Ron Clarke opened in Atlanta. This is what she had to say about that visit:

When I got to visit his school a couple of years ago, he told us the thing he didn't write about in the books because the publishers weren't sure about it and because

it wouldn't make a good movie. He talked about the actual way he broke through to these kids: When he started teaching them about African American history and bringing that to light, and not making it just about slavery all the time. He made it about the amazing history of kings and queens and tribal structures and that their history is beautiful and amazing, and that they were then enslaved, and making them feel empowered.

Linda quoted Ron as saying, "When I, as a White man, started acknowledging this broken system and began celebrating where the kids came from, that's when they believed in me, and that's when they started working hard. That changed everything." Linda's interest in Ron Clarke and his Atlanta school resonates with her understanding of how honoring a student's culture can improve their academic success. She stated,

So, you know, I think that the more acknowledgment of their culture in the school, and how their culture fits into the larger American culture would probably make them feel like there's more of a seat for them at the table, and that might make them feel more connected.

Because Linda had mentioned at the beginning of the interview that she is an adjunct professor at a nearby university, I was certain that she had heard about culturally relevant pedagogy, so I asked her if this was what Ron Clark was using. Her response was, "Yeah, and more than that, not even just relevant, but like that he honors it and highlights it. And then, I think you might see the families buy into this is a little bit more too." She went on to suggest that "schools should have volunteer requirements for parents." She emphasized her firm belief that parents need to be in the building. She noted that,

Ron Clark requires 100 hours a year from each parent. And he's a private school, so, it's different. But we could require 2 hours. It's something I think the parents would do if they knew what was needed; they would do it.

Another suggestion that Linda made regarding what schools could do to improve the academic achievement of Latino students is to require parents to participate in some kind of monthly or quarterly activity at school. Linda added,

I think they would come in if you said something like, 'hey, can you come in and help me cut out a bunch of paper, or can you run flashcards with a kid'? They could read a story in Spanish. You could do whatever you want, you know? If you give them a specific thing to do, and you invited parents in once per semester, or once a quarter, and make them come in, then I think that could be a good shift.

Linda also discussed the struggles of e-learning from last year, but she also had some positive outcomes from e-learning. She shared,

For me, e-learning is really challenging. It was very hard. But the one positive thing that came out of it is that in those 3 months, I connected and had more conversations with more parents than I have in my 11 years working here.

The most striking observation that Linda made about parents was when she said,

what I learned is that it's not that parents don't care, and it's not that they don't want to be there. It's that they don't know-how. Last spring, they would text me until 11:00 at night trying to get their kids' work turned in. Like, they cared. And so, I know that we have to fix that communication issue. They want to be there.

So, we have to give them the opportunity.

I was fascinated by Linda's insight on what schools can do to improve the academic

success of Latino student. Our conversation moved to Chromebooks and other devices that parents do not know how to use. Linda added that “We have to have some kind of professional development for parents, because I suspect, and they don't know how to sign in on Chromebooks.” She continued,

We need to have some kind of a parent academy. So, we need to create a School Parent University, with video tutorials in English and Spanish. I believe we have to offer tutorials. And I think we have to make them available on our school's website. And that's, I think, one thing we can do.

Linda was passionate about Ron Clarke and how he was able to celebrate his students' culture daily to promote student success. She was also passionate about inviting parents into her school to have a connection with teachers, which would then lead to student engagement and, ultimately, to student academic success.

Jose approached the question of what schools can do to improve the academic success of Latino students by looking at bilingual models of instruction. He began by stating,

I mean, schools have tried to engage students as much as they can. So, they're trying to work on class sizes, trying to have a curriculum that better serves bilingual kids. So, having bilingualism, I think, is a huge thing.

I asked Jose to explain precisely what he meant by *bilingualism* and what that would look like in schools. He responded,

I mean being able to use the child's native language. If Spanish is their native language, then schools should use it. And I think we need to start thinking seriously about dual language programs in which *translanguaging* is the way to

teach this population of students. [Translanguaging is the process whereby multilingual speakers use their languages as an integrated communication system.]

Jose acknowledged that many schools are moving in the direction of dual language programs, but not his school. He stated,

There's some political stuff that needs to be worked out. Our School Board is still not talking about it. The School Board members are still the old Italians that used to live here years ago, and they still want schools the way that they were 40 and 50 years ago. They will eventually leave the board, and younger people will replace them, and maybe things will change.

It sounds like Jose is hopeful that things will improve at this school district and that perhaps in the future, they will adopt a dual language as a model of instruction for bilingual students.

Barbara answered this question much as Linda did. Barbara believes that schools should be more committed to inviting parents to classrooms and providing parents with various classes. She explained,

I think it has to do with how welcoming the school is and whether or not they are valuing the students' cultures. Are you trying to make families feel welcome? Are you making sure that this is a safe place for the students? Are you making sure that it's a safe place for parents? Do you have programs set up like maybe classes or opportunities for parents to get together, to mingle, to learn together?

Barbara feels that schools need to focus on the positive experiences children bring to school and not just the negative ones. For example, she noted,

If a school can be a place where the parents feel comfortable and don't think every time the school is calling that it's a bad thing, they will feel welcome and reach out for things that they need that might not even be school-related.

I was impressed by Barbara's ability to think outside of the box. Teachers should be encouraged to be creative and to find innovative ways to reach students. I believe that Barbara is suggesting that parents are untapped resources that can help improve student success. She added,

Wouldn't it be great if schools could help the parents make resumes and find jobs and even have, I don't know, community college classes for parents? You hear so often, oh, well, his parents only have a sixth-grade education. I think that's part of why they're like, well, this kid is doing well enough. His parents only have a sixth-grade education.

Barbara shared an experience that she had with a family from Oaxaca, Mexico.

I had a student whose parents were from Oaxaca, and they couldn't read. And so, I would have to call them and say, the orange paper says this, this, and this. Please sign it if you agree. This other paper says this. I did this to keep them informed and to make them feel like a part of the school. Hopefully, the other teachers kept doing this for that student. But instead of just thinking, these parents only have a sixth-grade education, and we should be asking how we can help them? Schools are public institutions that should be helping the kids get better. But wouldn't it be cool if it was also helping the parents become more educated?

After Barbara shared her story, I shared a memory that I had years ago with a family from Oaxaca as well. I told her about a little boy who was having the most challenging time

reading Spanish in fourth grade. During the parent-teacher conference, his parents confided in me that they could barely teach him Spanish because Spanish is not their first language. They told me that Spanish is their second language, after Zapotec, an indigenous language from southern Mexico. At that moment, I understood why this student was having difficulties learning to read and write in Spanish. The mother shared that they were persecuted for speaking their language. They were made fun of for speaking their Native Indian language. So, they spoke Spanish to get by in Mexico. I just remember thinking, “oh, my God” as the lightbulb went on in my head. It was not that there was something wrong with this student, it was that he was learning Spanish and English at the same time. Barbara said that this child is actually trilingual. It is clear that sometimes even experienced teachers like me need to take a deeper look into our students’ lives.

It was interesting for me to hear Dela describe what schools could do to improve the academic success of Latino students. Dela had much the same thing to say as Linda and Barbara. All three focused on improving the relationship between parents and schools. Dela described a program called navigating the educational system that her former school district had implemented to help parents understand the expectations of the American school system. Dela described this program in this way:

It was like a recurring class for parents that taught them about our school system and what the principal’s expectations are. My understanding of it, ideally, is how to advocate for yourself, how to advocate for your child. The goal of this program was to help parents know their rights and be more demanding of those rights. Dela went on to describe a book that she is reading that touches on this notion.



Right now, I'm reading *Making Just One Change*, which is about the question formulation technique. In the beginning, it talks about teaching parents how to ask questions that empower them to question the power structures around them. So, I think some of it is that. Some of it is helping teach parents because I have parents who come into my room and refuse bilingual services.

What Dela is describing here is that many Spanish-speaking parents do not understand the benefit of bilingual education. Many believe that if they select the bilingual program for their children, their children will never learn English. This is not the case, so teachers need to explain how bilingual education works and how it increases their child's overall learning. Dela explained that in many cases, she has to call them and talk to them about it:

They will literally tell me, "Well, I don't know. I don't really think he needs bilingual education anymore. But whatever you think is best. You're the expert. You know what you're doing. Whatever you want to do, that's what you should do." And I'm like, "No. Advocate for your kid. You know them better than I do. It's your child."

Dela believes that it is essential to educate the parents on their rights and that they can control their child's education. What Dela described is very common. Bilingual parents often defer decision-making to the teacher because they firmly believe teachers know better.

Next, Dela described how teachers unknowingly put students in adverse situations. She believes they need to

educate themselves on cultural competence and cultural awareness, so they're not

accidentally doing microaggressions every day on their kids or like well-meaning people who don't know any better and do ignorant things. Nobody went into teaching because they wanted to be a jerk and torture children. But some people are jerks and torture children. So, being open and willing to learn, understanding, and recognizing that Latinos are not a monolith.

I completely agree with her assertion that some teachers are jerks. I told Dela the horrible story that I remembered from my first year of teaching. I was the fourth-grade bilingual teacher, and the third-grade bilingual teacher who was not a Latina was walking her students to the bathroom to take a bathroom break. Her boys were standing in line outside the bathroom, waiting for their turn to go in. This was a common method of ensuring that not all 12 boys went in at the same time. But what happened after that still sends chills down my spine. One of her third-grade boys accidentally walked into the boy's bathroom without waiting in line. My fellow bilingual teacher grabbed this boy by his arm and squeezed it to the point where I could see his flesh protruding between her fingers. She began to scold this student with such malice that he began to cry. She was relentless. Her face turned bright red with anger, and her eyes seemed to jump out of her face. She openly embarrassed him in front of his peers and in front of my class. I was speechless and motionless. I wanted to step in and stop this unwarranted assault, but I was frozen. That evening, I reflected on this situation and wondered why this person thought she had the patience to be a teacher, when she did not.

Barbara started to talk about stereotypes. She said, "there are so many stereotypes out there, like, for example, I like to listen to Banda and eat tortillas regularly." Barbara is explaining the stereotype that all Mexicans listen to Banda music and eat tortillas. In

her case, this is true.

Dela stated that even she could fall into stereotyping Latino students. She shared a story about one of her students during remote learning:

I had a student who, especially when we went to remote learning, would only ever work on her remote learning in the evening. She would message me at 11:00 p.m. and at 2:00 a.m. asking questions about trying to do her work, asking questions about other stuff. And when I'd ask about things during the day, she'd say that during the day, she has to help her mom. And she would never be more specific than that. But I kind of assumed she must need help working, or she's taking care of some kids. And then, she shared that her older sister, who is graduating from college with a degree in communications, started a podcast. And I was like, hey; you have an older sister who made it and was academically successful; I hadn't assumed that. There were so many assumptions that I had made that were probably incorrect. So, being willing and able to recognize that and improve it is essential.

I assured Dela that we all make assumptions about our students. Over the years, I, too, have made inaccurate assumptions about my Latino students.

Carole continued to maintain a narrow viewpoint when answering questions about what schools can do to improve the academic success of Latino students. Her response was once again focused on grammar, specifically vocabulary. She stated,

I think vocabulary needs to be explicitly taught at all grade levels, and it needs to be more exposed in all academics. So, labeling stuff around the gym, labeling stuff in the lunchroom. I tried to do this as much as I possibly can in the

lunchroom.

In addition to being the reading specialist in her school, Carole also supervised the kindergarten students during lunch and recess. She explained that “When a student raised their hand, I would say, ‘How can I help you?’ So, I would promote back and forth conversation instead of just looking at them and pointing them towards the lunch line.”

Carole was describing how she makes students use their vocabulary as much as possible.

She gave the following example of this:

Especially when I was with those kindergarteners, if they needed something opened, I made them put it into a sentence, ‘I will open your broccoli.’ ‘I will help you with your salad’ so that we promote everyday vocabulary in the lunchroom.

Simple things like that I think, are so essential to all students, but specifically

Latino students.

Carole shared a story about a time that she was giving a vocabulary test. She said,

It was such an eye-opening experience when I was giving a vocabulary test to kindergarteners, I flipped the card to reveal a piece of fruit, and the majority of the kindergartens couldn’t tell me the name of that piece of fruit. It was a pear.

So, it was at that point that I realized that they had a pear on their lunch tray the day before and probably did even know what it was. That was very eye-opening to me.

I can see that Carole is sensitive to the fact that not all Latino students know the English name for a certain fruit, and so she is making an effort to name the fruit that they are eating.

I shared a similar story about American food that I experienced when I was a

young grade-school child. When I was in school, our class would walk down to the cafeteria and line up at the lunch line. Back then, the lunch ladies made homemade food. This was the first time I had ever seen a grilled cheese sandwich, and it was served with tomato soup. I had never had tomato soup in my life; that was not what my mom cooked. I remember seeing this red thing and wondering “What is this?” Eventually, I took the grill cheese sandwich and the tomato soup like everybody else and sat down, and I just stared at it. I must admit that the grilled cheese was really good, but I never touched the tomato soup. Carole completely understood my experience because she sees this on a daily basis while she is working in the lunchroom. Based on her experiences with the pear, Carole stated,

I think schools need to be more conscious about labeling in English and labeling it in Spanish because especially now that we have a bilingual classroom. We’re building that basis and that foundation in Spanish. Now we need to bridge it to English, so let’s start identifying and labeling across the board around the building.

Maria focused her answer to the question of what schools can do to improve the academic success of Latino students by suggesting that school personnel need to make a greater effort to expose Latino students to extracurricular activities. She said, “So, again, I think making sure that they’re all engaged” She went on to tell me the following story about how extracurricular activities were rarely offered to her Latino students:

I remember when I was in Oak School District (pseudonym) for 12 years, I had gotten to know how everything worked in the schools. I was a traveling teacher there at the time; it was hard to see all my students. But I did feel like I learned so

much about just how everything worked there. I got to see kids going to band and other afterschool programs. This allowed me to ask teachers, ‘Oh, okay. Well, did you realize that my student isn’t involved in any extracurricular activities?’

They’re not in any afterschool programs’ or ‘They’re not doing band or orchestra.’ So, I would approach the music teacher, and I would say, ‘Is there any way that maybe you could try to encourage this student?’ ‘Could you maybe talk to them maybe during lunch one day and just have them come in individually and just experiment with some of the instruments? Maybe they can get involved in chorus.

Maria was focused on exposing her students to non-academic school activities. She wanted her students to feel like they also belong and were part of the school community. She said,

We need to make sure that every student is involved in something because when our kids, my Els, aren’t involved in anything, it’s easy for them to feel separate from school and not feel like they’re a part of it. So, for me, that really became one of my missions at this school.

Maria took it upon herself to ensure that the bilingual students were participating in extracurricular activities. She explained,

The older students were the ones who really were able to have those opportunities. So, as soon as things would open up, clubs and stuff, I would start talking to my kids about it. I would say, oh, which one do you think you’re going to join? Which one are you going to try first? Not even as if it was an option, just like, “All right, you got to pick one now. Which one are we going to do”?

Maria has a wonderful sense of inclusion, and her mission is to ensure that her students are not left behind. She posited, “I think the more that classroom teachers can do to help Latino students join extracurricular activities, and see the value in that, I think that would really help our students a lot and just help them see themselves within the school. I think other ways can happen by making sure that all cultures are being represented within the material that’s being presented.” Maria added that,

I know for myself as a student when I was growing up, that was something that was always really hard for me. For example, I hated social studies with a passion.

I hated social studies, and I didn’t realize until I got older and started going to high school that I hated it because there was nothing in there that related to me. I felt there was no connection, no connection whatsoever, to my family or me.

There was no one in that book that looked like me. So, I think that’s another piece that is so, so important for our kids. They need to see themselves reflected in there. They just do.

I agree with Maria on this point; Latino students need to see themselves reflected in the material they are learning. Maria shared another issue of discontent, and that is the lack of Latina teachers in schools. And another piece that I think is so important that as a student myself, I realized I got to a point where I started noticing that the only time there was a Hispanic teacher in the building was when they were ESL teachers, or they were the Spanish teachers; this always bothered me. This was another reason that I wanted to become a teacher because I felt like it is important for children like me to see themselves at all levels, at all capacities. Maria also shared,

This is the reason that I wanted to go back to school and get my administrative

degree because I feel like they should see themselves in all capacities. There should be classroom teachers that look like them. There should be principals that look like them. There should be superintendents that look like them. I mean, just at all levels.

I was happy when Maria shared that she had received her administrative certification. I told her that it's up to people like her to lead the way for Latino students. I encouraged her to become a principal. The categories that emerged from the predetermined question of what schools can do to improve the academic success of Latino students were as follows:

- Provide a welcoming school environment
- Encourage extracurricular participation
- Improve relationships with parents
- Honor bilingualism
- Use student's native language for instruction
- Value student's culture

Below, Figure 6 presents an illustration that identifies the Academics that emerged from the question: What can schools do to improve the academic success of Latino students?

Table 9 contains actual quotes from participants as they responded to each question.



**Figure 6**

*What Can Schools Do to Improve the Academic Success of Latino Students?*



**Table 9***Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question*

What can schools do to improve the academic success of Latino students?	Participant Quotes
Linda	Schools need to hire more Latino teachers. I think kids need to see themselves in their educators. Schools need to have higher standards and need to appreciate their student's culture.
Jose	Schools need to be able to use the child's native language. If Spanish is their native language, then schools should use it. And I think we need to start thinking seriously about dual language programs in which translanguaging is the way to teach this population of students.
Barbara	I think it has to do with how welcoming the school is and whether or not they are valuing the students' cultures. Are they trying to make families feel welcome? Are they making sure that this is a safe place for the students? Are they making sure that it's a safe place for parents? Do they have programs set up like classes or opportunities for parents to get together, to mingle, to learn together?
Dela	Schools should ensure that teachers understand the Latino cultural so they're not accidentally doing microaggressions every day on their kids or like well-meaning people who don't know any better and do ignorant things. Nobody went into teaching because they wanted to be a jerk and torture children. But some people are jerks and torture children. So, being open and willing to learn, understanding, and recognizing that Latinos are not a monolith.
Carole	I think schools need to be more conscious about labeling items in English and labeling items in Spanish, especially now that we have bilingual classrooms. We're building that basis and that foundation in Spanish. Now we need to bridge it to English, so let's start identifying and labeling across the board around the building.
Maria	I feel like it's important for Latino students to see themselves at all capacities. There should be classroom teachers that look like them. There should be principals that look like them. There should be superintendents that look like them.

Based on the data from Part 2 of the analysis, I analyzed teachers' understanding or lack of understanding of the Latino culture and examined whether their answers exhibit implicit biases or deficit views.

Over the last 20 years, I have witnessed a number of incidents where teachers have demonstrated a lack of understanding of the Latino culture. Could a lack of understanding impact Latino students' academic success? Could insensitivity to their culture have a negative effect on Latino students' ability to engage in school? I wanted to explore whether my participants had experienced biases against Latino students in school, and perhaps they could share some examples. I asked each participant to answer the following questions: (a) Can you think of a time that you witnessed a teacher demonstrating a lack of understanding of the Latino culture? (b) When thinking of society as a whole, what biases against Latino students have you heard of? and (c) What biases against Latino students do you think need to change in order to improve the academic outcome of Latino students?

Almost every participant had a visceral reaction to question number one. Perhaps they had never thought about it, or maybe they never thought someone would ask them about it. I am not sure, but I was glad that they were able to share their stories with me. I felt that Linda understood precisely what I was looking for, but at the same time, I felt that she was protecting teachers for their lack of understanding. She said,

Sometimes newer or younger teachers don't understand that parents and students are complex. For example, judging a kid because their parent doesn't speak the language, that must be why they don't call parents.

I asked her if this was an assumption that newer or younger teachers make. Linda said, “Yeah, but they need to call the parents and see what the parents even know. Like, let’s find out before you assume that the parent doesn’t care.” Linda went on to say that

when the teacher cannot communicate directly with the parent because of language barriers and the parent doesn’t reach out to the teacher; they automatically assume that it’s because they don’t care. So, I’ve seen that assumption a lot, which negatively impacts the student because it just becomes this thing where you don’t want to reach out. After all, they don’t reach, but you have to be the bigger one.

I think what Linda was describing here is that she has seen teachers who do not reach out to parents because of the language barrier, but she believes that they need to take additional measures to get through to the parents. It’s interesting to me that Linda chose to use the wording, “they need to be the bigger one.” This comment makes me think that perhaps this is more of a conflict that teachers have with Spanish-speaking parents; otherwise, why would she use the term “bigger one”? Using the term “bigger one” somehow implies that this issue has to do with winning or losing. I’m not sure, but this choice of words sounds odd to me.

Jose’s comment was quite insightful. I asked him if he has seen teachers demonstrating a lack of understanding of the Latino culture. He stated, “I don’t know if it’s necessarily Latino culture; it’s just not understanding poverty.” He shared a story that he witnessed between a school principal and a Latino student. He described,

A principal was in a big argument with one of my kids about it; I don’t even remember what it was about. She told him, ‘And before you go to bed, you need to do this and that, and you need to put your homework under your pillow,’ and the

girl was like, ‘I don’t have a bed. I sleep on a cushion on the floor of the living room.’

Jose could not even put into words how he felt when he witnessed this exchange. He told me,

I have children who live in one apartment with eight family members; dad was disabled, mom had to work two jobs to support the whole family, and they had a baby. They all lived in a one-bedroom apartment, and the girl slept on the floor with two or three of her siblings. So, that’s the way that was.

I shared a similar story with Jose, and we both agreed that this lack of understanding about how some Latinos survive in poverty.

Teachers can be competitive. Many see their students as teams that need to stand out. This is usually accomplished by comparing reading scores from the beginning of the year to the end and between classrooms. Barbara shared a hurtful experience that she had with teachers of monolingual students not that long ago:

Well, now I’m thinking of all of the comments that people have said, like family and friends and co-workers, about how far Latino students are in reading. Now, I’m thinking of what teachers have said about how the monolingual classrooms are reading at a higher level by the end of the year.

These types of comments were troubling to Barbara. She said that some teachers say things like, “So, I’m sure your class is maybe almost there.” Barbara said,

It just made me feel like I’m teaching the dumb kids. But I’m not. These kids are twice as smart as the English-only class. But also, I feel like it’s mostly just kind of like side remarks. I don’t think I’ve heard any straight-up racist things that

have been said, but just side remarks that are just kind of like those subconscious biases is most of what I've heard.

Barbara sees the value of understanding two languages, and she feels that some teachers just do not recognize that gift. Just like Barbara, I, too, have heard teachers make comments without thinking. When I was a bilingual teacher, I remember teachers saying things like, "You know, it's the bilingual kids who are keeping our scores so low." These comments troubled me 20 years ago, and they still bother me today because they are still happening.

Dela described a time that her Latino middle school students were upset with their reading teacher. According to Dela, this teacher learned to speak Spanish 40 years ago and was not as fluent as she thought she was. This teacher would ask her students to turn to page 65; then, she would repeat this in Spanish to the Latino students in her classroom. What she didn't realize is that many of her Latino students did not speak Spanish. Dela said,

Some of the kids were not bothered by it because they were newcomer kids, but some of them had been born here and didn't speak Spanish at home and were like, why is this lady telling me stuff in Spanish?

Dela added that some of the Latino students asked this teacher to stop speaking Spanish to them because they did not understand Spanish. They told her, "I speak English, and I prefer English." Dela also asked this teacher to stop trying to speak Spanish to the students she already knew did not speak Spanish. The teacher's response to this request was appalling. She told Dela, "It's my classroom, and I can speak whatever language I want to say. I can say 'hello' however, I want to say it." Dela did not pursue this issue any further. I believe that teachers need to this opportunity as a teachable moment with the insensitive teacher

and explain why these students are upset. If this does not help the situation, then teachers need to take these matters to the principal. Students should never be made to feel uncomfortable by the issue of language.

Carole believes that if and when teachers fail to understand the Latino culture, it's because they have too many other things to deal with. She stated,

I think, that unfortunately, this may happen because teachers are pulled in so many directions, and they have so many different hats to wear. For example, when they have a kid that doesn't understand something the first time, their first instinct is to think, 'They're never going to get it.' Instead of taking a moment, taking a step back, and thinking, 'Okay, is this a Latino kid? Is this maybe because this is the first time they've ever heard it or known anything about it?

Carole believes that teachers don't have time to understand the Latino culture because

teachers are just so stressed, so overwhelmed, and pulled in so many directions that sometimes it's hard to remember, "All students really need to hear new information at least five times before it sinks in. It's never going to sink in the first time. But I think we sometimes forget that.

I find it completely absurd to think that a seasoned teacher like Carole does not have time to learn about the Latino culture when 76% of the students in her school are Latino. And she has worked in the district for over 15 years. Perhaps all teachers need to have a deeper understanding of the Latino culture. This can be accomplished with professional development. But in my experience, administrators are not interested in doing this.

Unlike Carole, Maria believes that some teachers who don't understand the Latino

culture jump to inaccurate conclusions. She stated,

I've had some experiences with that passive attitude where the teachers will say like, "They don't know anything. They just sit there," and that kind of thing. And it's like, "No, it's not that they don't know anything. It's just that culturally they've been taught that you're not supposed to speak up, and you're not supposed to stand out. It's almost like they are gloating or that it's rude to speak out. It comes across as rude to try to show how smart you are or that kind of thing. So, just trying to teach the teachers or explain to them that, "This is something cultural. It's not that there is no sign of their intelligence. It's just something that they've been taught in their culture.

This observation is very accurate. I agree with Maria that behavior is very important to Latino families. I remember having parent-teacher conferences. Before I could talk about their grades, parents wanted to know how their child was behaving. Respect and behavior outside of the home reflect a parent's ability to raise a child. Below is an illustration that identifies the themes that emerged from the questions surrounding a lack of understanding of the Latino culture.

The categories that emerged from the predetermined question of can you think of a time when you witnessed a teacher demonstrating a lack of understanding of the Latino culture were as follows:

- Negatively judging students because their parents do not speak English
- Latino students don't do anything in class
- Teachers do not understand the impact of poverty
- Teacher's intolerance of student language preferences

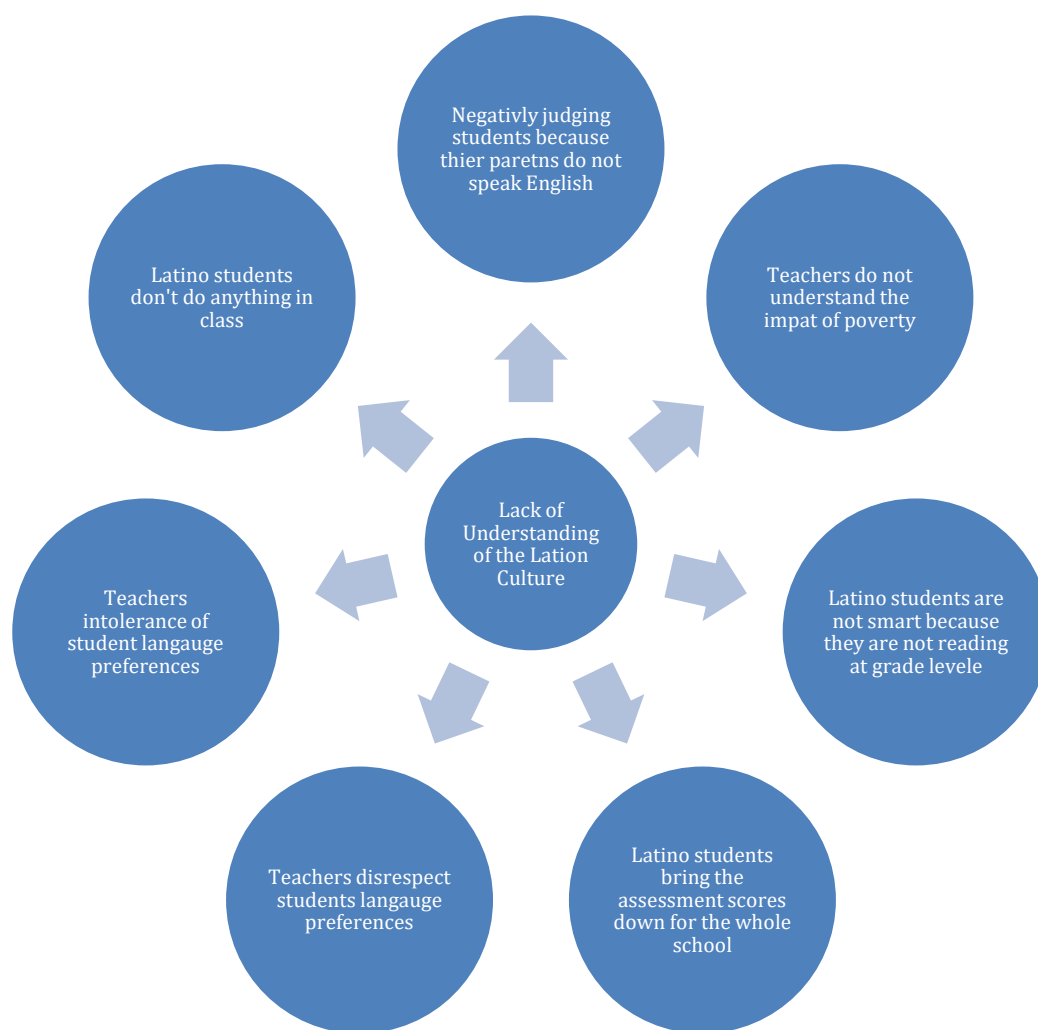


- Latino students are not smart because they are not reading at grade level
- Teachers disrespect student's language preference
- Latino students bring the assessment scores down for the whole school

Below, Figure 7 presents an illustration that identifies the categories that emerged from this question. Table 10 contains actual quotes from participants as they responded to each question.

**Figure 7**

*Lack of Understanding of the Latino Culture*



**Table 10***Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question*

Can you think of a time when you witnessed a teacher demonstrating a lack of understanding of the Latino culture?		Participant Quotes
Linda		When the teacher cannot communicate directly with the parent because of language barriers and the parent doesn't reach out to the teacher, they automatically assume that it's because the parents don't care. So, I've seen that assumption a lot and then that negatively impacts the student because then it just becomes this thing where, you don't want to reach out because they don't reach, but you have to be the bigger one.
Jose		I don't know if it's necessarily Latino culture; it's just not understanding poverty. I witnessed a school principal and a Latino student in a big argument. The principal was telling the student, 'And before you go to bed, you need to do this and that, and you need to put your homework under your pillow,' and the girl was like, 'I don't have a bed. I sleep on a cushion on the floor of the living room.'
Barbara		I don't think I've heard any straight-up racist things that have been said but just side remarks that are just kind of like those subconscious biases. For example, teachers have said that the monolingual classrooms are reading at a higher level by the end of the year.
Dela		I heard a teacher say, "it's my classroom, and I can speak whatever language I want to. I can say hello; however, I want to say it." I believe that teachers should never make Latino students feel uncomfortable by speaking to them in Spanish when the Latino student does not speak Spanish.
Carole		When teachers have a kid that doesn't understand something the first time, they're instinct is to think, 'They're never going to get it.' Instead of taking a moment, taking a step back and thinking, 'Okay, is this a Latino kid? Is this maybe because this is the first time, they've ever heard it or known anything about it?'
Maria		I've had some experiences where teachers will say, 'They don't know anything. They just sit there'. And it's like, "No, it's not that they don't know anything. It's just that culturally they've been taught that you're not supposed to speak up, and you're not

supposed to stand out. It's almost like they are gloating or that it's rude to speak out. It comes across as rude to try to show how smart you are. So, teachers need to understand that this is something cultural. It's not that there is no sign of their intelligence. It's just something that they've been taught in their culture.

---

### **When Thinking of Society as a Whole, What Biases Toward Latino Students Have You Heard of?**

My research question asked how teachers' narratives about their attitudes toward Latino students conform to or resist a racialized understanding about student achievement. In order to obtain candid responses about biases and stereotypes, I predicted that it would be easier to ask them if they had ever heard of any biases or stereotypes about Latino students in society as a whole. The participants shared a variety of prejudices and stereotypes that they have heard from teachers and others. I was intrigued that although some participants saw Latino families as having a positive effect on the academic outcome of Latino students, others described biases against Latino families. Linda shared what she has heard other teachers say in the past:

Yeah, you tend to listen to some negative things like a multi-generational family, like, having large amounts of people in one home. But I lived with a grandmother growing up. So, I think overcrowding and not having time for anybody, and the kids don't have their own space, are many assumptions about Latino students.

Linda has also heard that Latino students

don't do their homework because they don't have anywhere to do it. It's like, how do you know that? How do you know that there isn't a kitchen table for them to sit at? Like, they don't have to have their own room or their own desk for it to be great. They live with their aunt and their uncle and their cousins, and da, da, da.

So, they must not ever have any quiet to do their work. It's like, well, you don't know that. Maybe there is a quiet hour that is enforced by all of these adults so that the people can do their homework. I don't know. So, I think they just assume it's chaos.

It frightens me to hear that some teachers believe that Latino students live in chaos. I asked Linda if she had heard this, and her answer was yes. She explained that in some individual cases, and for some individual students, it could be chaotic. She does not believe, however, that having too many relatives living together is necessarily the reason for chaos. She believes that multigenerational homes can actually help with child-raising. She said that "it could be very helpful to have another adult that can help you with a kid around the house, you know?" It sounds like some teachers believe there is value in a multigenerational family yet, others believe this can lead to a chaotic family environment.

Jose responded frankly when I asked him what biases exist about Latino students. He asked me if he could quote then-president Donald Trump, then listed the exact words that Trump used to describe Latinos disparagingly: "They're rapists, they're bad hombres, and they come from shithole countries." Jose was kind of laughing as he repeated the president's words, but at the same time, I could see the frustration in his face, and I could hear it in his voice. I shared a situation that I had years ago with one of my neighbors. After living next to me for 10 years, my neighbor told me that they were moving. I asked why because I thought they really liked our neighborhood and our schools. I was shocked when she said they were moving because a Mexican family had moved in across the street. I, on the other hand, was happy to have this Mexican family living across the street because they were always inviting me over for cookouts. I missed

eating authentic Mexican food, so I appreciated the invitation. My neighbor said, “Well, we just can’t live across from them anymore.” She went on to explain that, “We don’t like the way that they’re looking at my daughter.” My neighbor knew that I was Mexican, yet she did not recognize how offensive her comments were to me.

Much like Jose, Barbara also cited Trump’s anti-Latino rhetoric as a notable biased belief about Latinos. She stated, “I feel like as a whole, our culture in America, especially right now, especially with Trump in office, is just so disheartening because I feel like they don’t care about them.” Barbara began talking about Vanessa Guillén, the 20-year-old Army soldier who was murdered in April 2020 inside Fort Hood, Texas, by another enlisted soldier. Barbara stated,

Yeah, I was surprised in a good way that it was in the news; something needs to be done about this. And I’m like yes, finally. We’re valuing these lives. I’m kind of hoping that it kind of piggybacks the whole Black Lives Matter thing because America needs to wake up and realize there’s a lot of lives we haven’t been valuing for a long time.

I agree with Barbara’s assessment of the murder of this young soldier. I am happy that it is on the news and that people are interested in finding justice for her. Barbara also shared the biases that one of her family members holds toward Latino students. Barbara recalled sharing her excitement about her new job with her family. She taught kindergarten children to read in English and Spanish and keep their culture and heritage and be proud of it. She became upset when her cousin said, “Well, why does that matter because none of them are going to college, and half of them will probably be in jail anyway?” She said, “I had nothing to say to him because it’s like what do you say to somebody who says that

and either thinks it's funny or actually believes it?" These types of disparaging comments are alive and well in our country. Sadly, not much has changed since I was in elementary school in the 1970s; only back then did people not hold back. These types of racist comments were rampant in my school. It saddens me to know that many in this country still hold these beliefs.

Dela shed light on a different type of bias that exists today. Dela described what she has heard a teacher say in the past: "I'm going to assume you're uneducated, I'm going to assume that you don't have a lot of money." Dela began talking about the increase of positive COVID-19 cases in the town where she works, and I could see how upset she was getting. She listed what she has read on Facebook about Mexican families and why they have such a high rate of COVID-19 cases. She said,

You're going to see some crazy, crazy, ignorant comments on Facebook. The COVID-19's numbers are high because they're all dirty Mexicans, and they live together overcrowded in their apartments, and they don't follow the rules, and they just have parties all the time. Oh, and they have a ton of kids. Yes, and when you have five kids and two parents, that's seven people.

Dela was quick to note that in some cases, "you have two families living together, and you're over the limit for your quarantine numbers, but it's two households, so leave them alone."

She also shared that having lots of kids is another assumption or bias. For example, she has heard, "You're having so many kids, but you can't afford them. Personally, the families that I know that have lots of kids are all White." I find it astounding that Carole said, "I don't really feel like I hear a lot of biases." I do not know

what to make of this comment, other than she does not want to admit what she has heard, or perhaps she feels that if she says something, I will think that she believes it. Carole described a generational divide that might explain Latino stereotypes:

I mean, I can tell you that my own parents, just because of the generation that they are in, have their own experience and they have biases. But for the most part, I don't think the majority of the people that I come into contact with professionally or outside of buildings really do, other than I mean, I don't think it's a bias. I think it's an accurate statement like Latinos have a harder time because they're dealing with learning two languages.

I thought that if I shared that my own sister has biases toward bilingual education, she might open up more and share what she has heard. I told Carole that my sister does not think we should be using Spanish at all in the classrooms because when she arrived from Mexico, no one spoke Spanish to her. This statement prompted Carole to share what her neighbors have said in the past:

Well, I guess one bias is that you've got people who feel it should just be fully immersed in English. I guess the other bias that I hear sometimes is just that, why is there so much Spanish being spoken in schools when our end result is to speak in English?

The majority of people do not have the slightest idea of how bilingual education functions and, therefore, continue making these types of comments.

When I asked Maria whether or not she has heard any biases toward Latino students, she seemed a bit reluctant to share—not because she had never heard any biases, but mostly because she had heard enough. She said, “I think that teachers believe

that Latino students don't care. That idea that they don't do well because they just don't care, they're not motivated. I think that's it." This is all Maria was willing to share with me.

The categories that emerged from the predetermined question of when thinking of society as a whole, what biases toward Latino students have you heard were as follows:

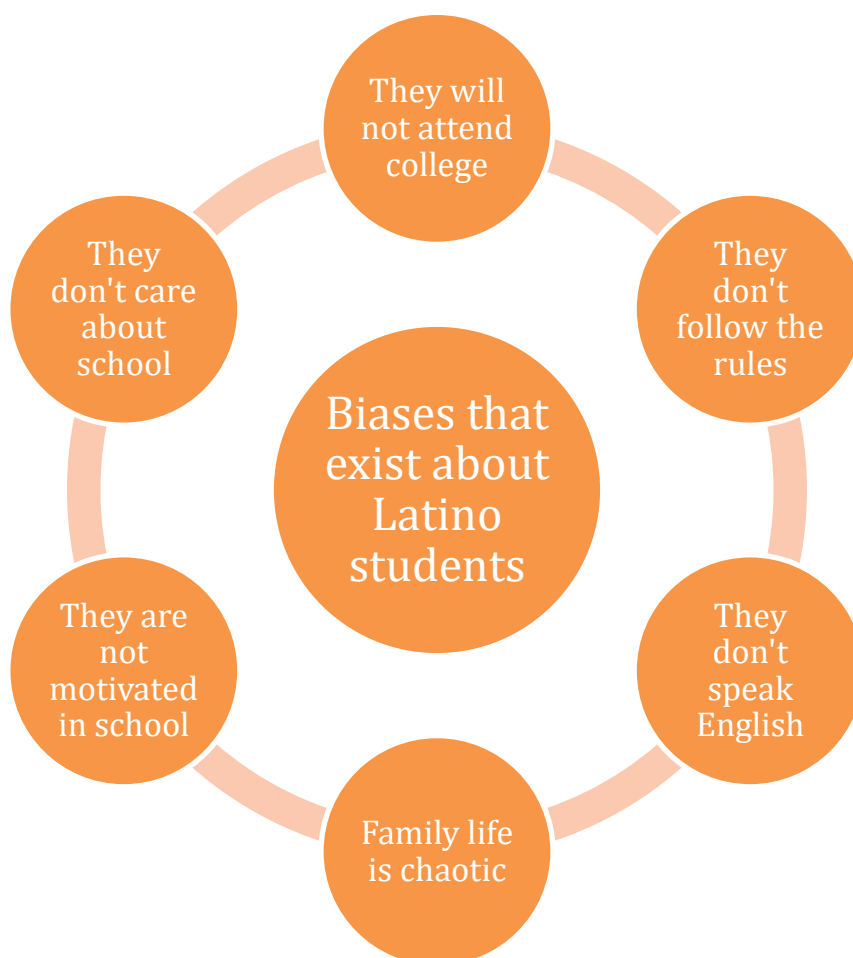
- They will not attend college
- They don't care about school
- They don't follow rules
- They are not motivated in school
- They don't speak English
- Family life is chaotic

Below Figure 8 illustrates the themes that emerged from the questions surrounding Biases that exist about Latino students.



**Figure 8**

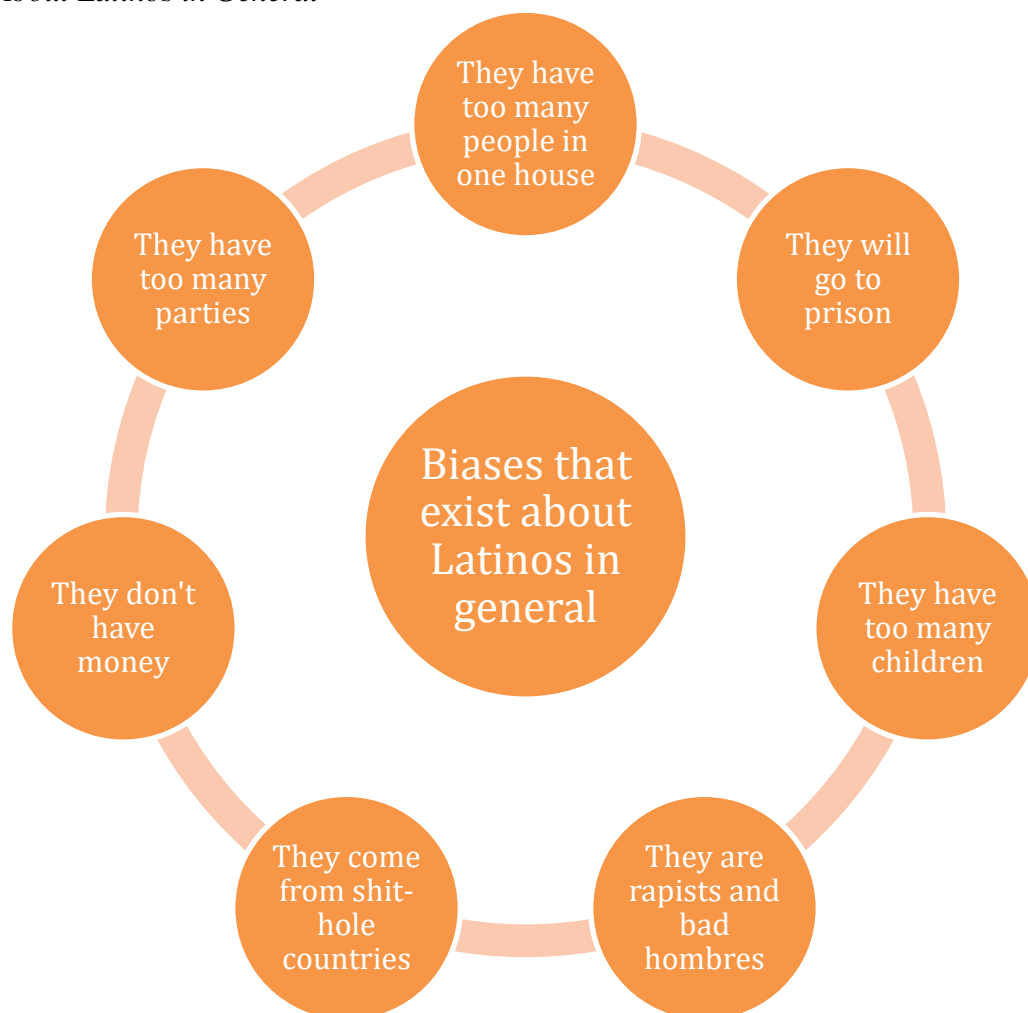
*Specific Biases About Latino Students*



Below, Figure 9 presents an illustration that identifies the categories that emerged from the questions surrounding biases that exist about Latinos in general. Table 11 contains actual quotes from participants as they responded to each question.

**Figure 9**

*Biases About Latinos in General*



**Table 11***Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question*

When thinking of society as a whole, what biases toward Latino students have you heard of?	Participant Quotes
Linda	You tend to hear some negative things like they live in multi-generational family, they have large amounts of people in one home. So, I think overcrowding and not having time for anybody, and the kids don't have their own space, are a lot of assumptions about Latino students.
Jose	They're rapists, they're bad hombres, and they come from shithole countries.
Barbara	I feel like, as a whole, our culture in America, especially right now, especially with Trump in office, is just so disheartening because I feel like they don't care about them. I've heard people say, none of them are going to college, and half of them will probably be in jail.
Dela	The COVID-19 number is high because they're all dirty Mexicans and they live together overcrowded in their apartments and don't follow rules and just have parties all the time. They have a ton of kids, and they can't afford them.
Carole	I guess one bias is that you've got people who feel that school should just be fully immersed in English. I guess the other bias that I hear sometimes is that why is there so much Spanish being spoken in schools when our end result is to speak in English?
Maria	I think that teachers believe that Latino students don't care and that they don't do well because they just don't care about school, they're not motivated.

### **What Biases Against Latino Students Do You Think Need to Change in Order to Improve Their Academic Outcomes?**

Now that I have explored the possibility that biases about Latino students exist in society, I wanted my participants to tell me exactly which biases need to change in order for Latino students to be academically successful in school. If teachers are made aware of the biases that exist about Latino students, they may be able to change their narrative about Latino students. Linda spoke about implicit bias without hesitation:

I think that there's an implicit bias that I've witnessed that I don't even think people realize that they're this way. But it's like when they think that all students have trauma, and they all need help. And we just need to help them. And it's like a savior complex almost. And I think it's not even like you believe you are that way, but you are. Like, somehow, your systems of SEL (Social Emotional Learning) are going to fix it. And it's like, first of all, they don't need to be fixed. They need tools and standards. So, I think there is a bias that these kids come in some way like broken and that we have to fix them.

Linda's statement about fixing Latino students because they are somehow broken, sounds very much like what Jose stated earlier about how some teachers see Latino students as "pobresitos" (poor little things). I guess these beliefs come from a place of caring and concern, but like Linda said, not every Latino student is broken.

According to Jose, one stereotype that needs to change is the fact that not all Latinos speak Spanish. He said,

Well, you know what? One stereotype that sometimes teachers have is that, because they are Latinos, they speak Spanish. And that is not necessarily the case. They

might have some Spanish in their background; sometimes, that is my stereotype. I assume that because they are Latino or because they have a Latino last name that sounds very ethnic that they are Spanish-speaking, and that's not the case.

Jose is not the only one who has this bias. My own father used to speak Spanish to people in grocery stores or restaurants when he saw a Latino name on their name tag. As a child, this was embarrassing to me because oftentimes, my father would lecture them on the benefits of being bilingual.

Much like the rest of her answers, Barbara focuses on the lack of value placed on speaking Spanish. Barbara said, "I think we need to make sure that bilingualism is emphasized and that people value it." She compared how Europeans view bilingualism and how Americans view bilingualism, but she focused on languages of prestige like French and German. Barbara said,

I think it would be great if people looked more into what they do in Europe. Because I feel like a lot of times, it's like, oh, it's just Spanish, but French is classy. You're bilingual and you speak French, oh, that's so classy. You're like, oh, German or oh, Italian. So, maybe if we tried to change it a little bit and say, oh, look, this is what the fancy Europeans are doing because they're all bilingual and trilingual. I think if we approached it that way, we might have a little more success. But I think if every single school was bilingual and it was valued and people could see how positive that would be.

I could feel the passion that Barbara has about being bilingual and how she wants the rest of the world to see the value that she sees in bilingual students. She wants schools and teachers to value students who speak Spanish. She stated,

I think if it was finally valued, then we might be able to help a student coming in not being able to speak English but can speak another language. Everyone would feel like I do where they go, oh, my gosh, your potential is so amazing. You're just going to soar. Keep that language. Learn English. You're going to be so far ahead of your peers. I think if more people knew about the research that backs that up then, I think they'd be a lot more excited about it and value those students.

Barbara was voicing some of the notions that I have felt over my years of teaching bilingual education. I explained to Barbara that you do not even have to go to Europe to see bilingual education. Quebec Canada is a perfect example of French and English being held in the same regard. Barbara said that this is possible "because French is classy and White people speak it. I, literally, think that's why." She added,

I think it comes from a lot of fear really. I think people think, oh, if we all learn how to speak English and Spanish, pretty soon, English will just be wiped out, and all of the signs will be in Spanish. And what if we only know English? We won't be able to get by, and all of the Mexicans will just come up here and steal all of our jobs because they'll know English and Spanish, and we'll only know English.

This was the first time I heard a non-Latina verbalize what many of us have been thinking for years: that speaking Spanish is not a valued asset in the United States.

Dela mentioned a lot of biases that need to change about Latino students and families. To begin with, she talked about theoretical assumptions: "A lot of the assumption needs to change, like regular work is too hard for them, that they can't do the same kind of reading or grade-level work, that their parents aren't educated and that their parents don't want to help them."

Dela shared a story about a fellow teacher. “I remembered another ignorant thing that was said about Latinos in poverty. There was a teacher who didn’t understand why parents wouldn’t help their kids with their homework or check their homework.” This teacher lamented, “It only takes 5 minutes to sit down with your kid, have a routine every single night, it only takes 5 minutes. It’s not that hard. Why don’t they care enough about their kids to do this”? Dela explained that this teacher had no concept and no idea about parent work schedules and other life obligations. She said that this teacher “was coming at it from a very, very White, middle-class point of view and could not understand why everyone in the world didn’t just do this thing that he does with his kids every day.”

I shared a similar story with Dela that I had recently experienced. I told her about a fourth-grade teacher who had sent me an email complaining that one of her students was not logging into class during remote learning and therefore was disrespectful toward her. Dela said that this teacher was probably feeling like “it’s a personal attack that the student was not logging in.”

Dela added that during distance learning, her school district asked teachers to check-in and see how their students were doing. She said that they were given specific instructions to check on their students' wellbeing and see if they were okay. Some teachers decided to send parents emails scolding their kids for not logging in. Dela described the emails that she was asked to translate into Spanish as “shame emails.” She said some of the emails that they were sending out to parents were shaming the parents and shaming the kids. She said that these were not caring emails. They were emails stating that it had been 2 weeks, and he had not completed a single assignment despite the district’s repeated efforts. Dela reiterated that “this was not the same message that I heard

from the district.” Dela was conflicted because she did not want to translate these hurtful emails, and she thought about changing the wording. In the end, she was more upset that these teachers could not understand a different perspective and that maybe the students did not have Internet service.

The only bias that Carole described had to do with bilingual education versus full English immersion. She said,

I think just the understanding that we need to do more to bridge the two languages.

I think even in our building, we have some with a mindset of full immersion. Full immersion does work for some, but it doesn’t work for everyone, and maybe it’s just to educate people that we need to build the native language well so you can be able to transfer it over to English, and it’s no big deal.

Carole may say that it is “no big deal,” but it is still a big deal to some teachers. This is why all teachers need to take a class on how bilingual education works and how learning to read in your home language will first transfer into learning to read in English.

Like Dela, Maria also discussed the biases that some teachers have against speaking another language. She explained, “I think that Latino students have a lot of things of value, and yes, language can be a barrier sometimes, but that should also be viewed as a strength. There’s so much that can come with that language.” Maria continued to provide examples of deficit thinking simply because a student is not yet proficient in English:

Even though they may not have the language, it doesn’t mean that they don’t have anything to offer or that they can’t be leaders. I think they just need the opportunities to show that leadership and to be encouraged and to be given those



opportunities. But those opportunities need to be explicitly given, not just it's offered to everyone. They need someone to approaches them and says, 'Hey, I think you're really good at this, I think you could really do this really well.' They need that connection because, without that personal connection, it just doesn't happen.

I could see that Maria was referring to how her students have not had the opportunity to join sports teams, bands, or music. She understands the value of connecting to something other than academics in school. She also perceives the importance of seeing themselves in extracurricular activities.

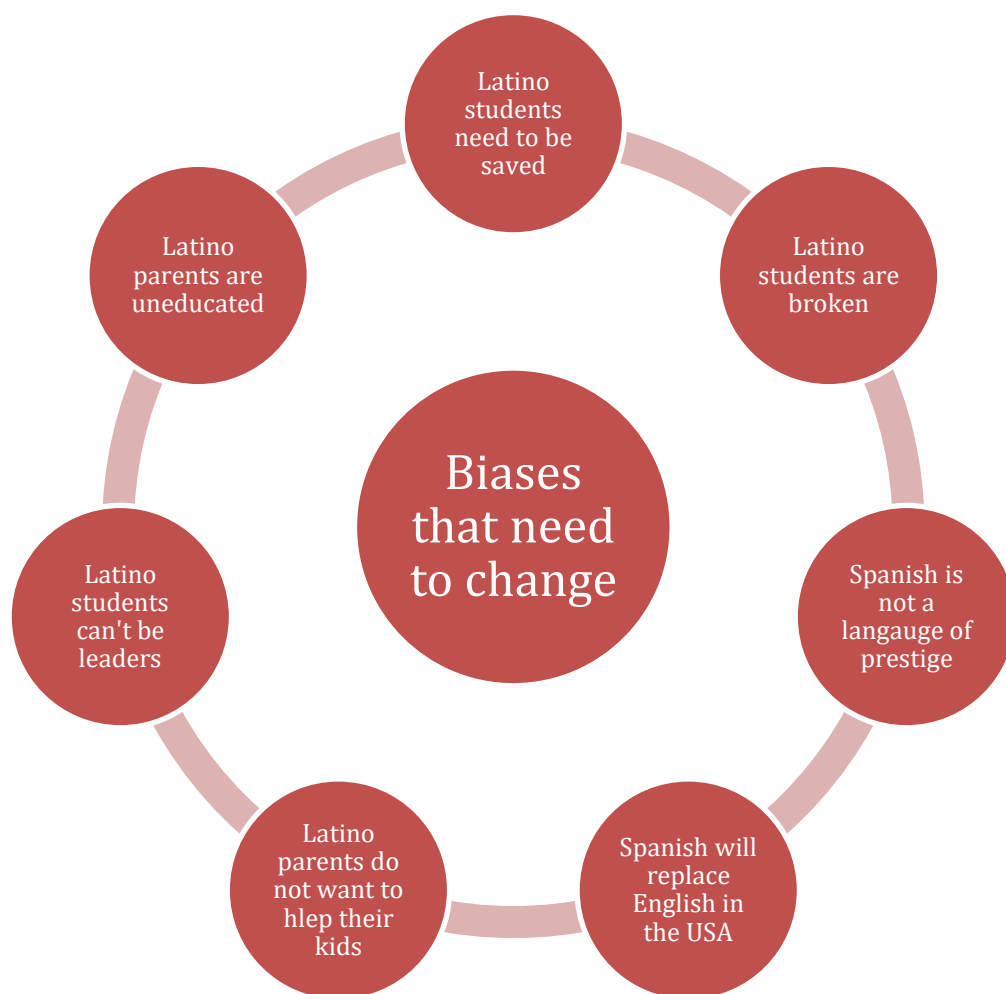
The categories that emerged from the pre-determined question, what biases against Latino students do you think need to change in order to improve their academic outcome are as follows:

- Latino students need to be saved
- Latino parents are uneducated
- Latino students are broken
- Latino students can't be leaders
- Spanish is not a language of prestige
- Latino parents do not want to help their kids
- Spanish will replace English in the United States

Figure 10 below illustrates the categories that emerged from the question surrounding biases about Latino students that need to change. Table 12 contains actual quotes from participants as they responded to each question.

**Figure 10**

*Biases About Latino Students That Need to Change*



**Table 12***Participant Quotes as They Responded to Each Question*

What biases against Latino students do you think need to change in order to improve their academic outcome?	Participant Quotes
Linda	I think that there's an implicit bias that I've witnessed. Teachers think that all students have trauma, and they all need help. It's almost like a savior complex. So, I think there is bias that these kids come in broken somehow and that we have to fix them.
Jose	One stereotype that teachers sometimes have is that, because they are Latinos, they speak Spanish. And that is not necessarily the case.
Barbara	I think if we valued speaking Spanish like we value German or French we might have a little more success.
Dela	I think that some biases come from a lot of fear really. I think people think that pretty soon English will just be wiped out and all of the signs will be in Spanish. We won't be able to get by and all of the Mexicans will just come up here and steal all of our jobs because they'll know English and Spanish and we'll only know English. A lot of the assumption need to change, like regular work is too hard for them, that they can't do the same kind of reading or grade level work, that their parents aren't educated and that their parents don't want to help them.
Carole	I think just the understanding that we need to do more to bridge the two languages. We have some with a mindset of full immersion. Full immersion work for some, but it doesn't work for everyone and maybe it's just to educate people that we need to build the native language well so you can be able to transfer it over to English and it's no big deal.
Maria	Even though they may not have the language, it doesn't mean that they don't have anything to offer or that they can't be leaders. I think they just need the opportunities to show that leadership and to be encouraged, and to be given those opportunities. But those

opportunities need to be explicitly given. They need someone to approaches them and says, 'Hey, I think you're really good at this, I think you could really do this really well'. They need that connection because without that personal connection, it just doesn't happen.

---

### **Analysis Summary**

The participants in this study shared their candid opinions and beliefs related to the academic success of Latino students. The information that they shared with me helped me understand their experiences working with Latino students. I truly enjoyed listening to their stories about teaching and their experiences working with other teachers. I felt that I learned more about how teachers perceive Latino students when my participants reflected on what they have heard other teachers say about Latino students. Because my research question has to do with a racialized understanding of Latino student academic achievement, I thought that if I asked my participants to tell me what they have heard about Latino students' academic achievement, they would feel more comfortable talking about racialized issues. This is precisely what happened.

After listening to the multitude of biases that exist about Latinos and specifically about Latino students, I felt a great sense of sadness and hurt. When I compare my experiences as a young student to the experiences that Latino children are experiencing today, I do not see much difference. I feel that biases about Latinos should have changed by now and that a greater understating of the Latino culture should be in place by now. What I do understand is that much improvement is needed. Children today should not be experiencing the same type of racial misunderstanding that I experienced 40 years ago.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **INTERPRETATION AND FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter begins by reminding the reader of the research questions. I then describe the emerging themes. The following section includes my interpretation of the data and a thorough triangulation of the dissertation findings with the literature review. The remainder of the chapter includes study findings, answers to the research questions, validity and trustworthiness, limitations of this study, recommendations for future research, implications of this study, and the personal meaning of the dissertation's journey for me. In the last section, I provide a final summary and final insights. To remind the reader, the questions that drove my research and guided the processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation were:

1. How do teachers' narratives about Latino students conform to or resist a racialized understanding of Latino student achievement?
2. How do teachers perceive their Latino students?

#### **Interpretation of Data**

In this section, I provide an interpretation of the data. The analysis of the responses to the interview questions based on selected predetermined categories helped me gain a holistic understanding of the data and identify themes and relationships among the teachers' points of view (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Throughout the process, I was mindful of the research questions that underlie my dissertation study.

## Emerging Themes

Having established predetermined categories allowed me to group the data from each category into overarching themes. I was able to use participants' own words as data points which helped me create the following themes: (a) Self-Efficacy, (b) Academic Achievement, (c) Student Support, and (d) Negative Perceptions. First, I will discuss the process of establishing the first central theme, Self-Efficacy. Although my participants never used the word self-efficacy, they described successful Latino students as being resilient, motivated, having perseverance, and being confident. As I continued to analyze the raw data, I realized that my participants were describing characteristics of a positive sense of self. I took their examples and grouped them into categories. These categories reminded me of someone who has agency—or, rather, self-efficacy. Perhaps my participants were not fully aware that they were describing self-efficacy, or maybe this was an unconscious decision on their part. But in either case, the ultimate result of their descriptions led me to the theme of Self-Efficacy. Albert Bandura (1996) described *self-efficacy* as having the ability to persevere, face difficulty, and have resilience to adversity. Bandura explained that children's beliefs in their efficacy to regulate their learning activities and master challenging subject matter affect their academic motivation, interests, and Academic achievements. Within this theme, two subthemes emerged: Nature vs. Nurture. These two subthemes emerged as I interpreted the way my participants described the successful Latino students. I questioned whether the words they used to describe successful Latino students are characteristics that come from within the student himself, nature, or something that they can learn in school or at home, nurture. This is a question that I cannot answer here. Still, it is important to note that whether the

student intrinsically possesses self-efficacy or whether it can be learned, the majority of the participants' descriptions fell under this theme.

Next, I will describe the process which led me to the second theme: Academic Achievement. The responses from the participants to questions of how teachers, schools, and Latino students themselves can improve their academic success revealed a number of categories. These categories included implementing higher expectations for Latino students, reading more books, explicit vocabulary instruction, feeling valued, honoring bilingualism, and valuing a student's culture. All participants cited these areas as essential characteristics in the academic success of Latino students. My interpretation of this central theme allowed me to differentiate one step further because some participants cited concrete strategies that can be implemented to support the academic success of Latino students, like explicit vocabulary instruction. Still others cited emotional considerations like providing a welcoming school environment and feeling valued and valuing the student's culture. Therefore, I identified two subthemes within the major theme of Academic Achievement: (a) Classroom Instruction and (b) Feeling Valued.

The third theme to emerge from the data is Student Support. This theme also has two subthemes: Teacher Support and Parental Support. After reading the raw data, it became clear that there was a distinct difference in providing academic support for Latino students. Although all participants felt that Latino students needed to feel supported, some felt that this was the school's responsibility, while others placed this responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the parents/family. What helped me decide that the theme Student Support needed to be broken down into two subthemes because some participants

felt that teachers needed to make better connections with parents and that they need to improve their relationships with parents. At the same time, some participants felt that parents needed to provide a safe home environment, they need to read more to their children, and they need to increase their involvement with schools.

The fourth theme to emerge from my data pertains to biases. After reviewing my participants' answers to the predetermined questions surrounding biases, it became clear to me that I should call this fourth theme, *Negative Perceptions*. Within this theme, two subthemes emerged: (a) Biases Toward Latinos in General and (b) Biases Specifically about Latino Students. In the section below, I explore each of the themes and subthemes that emerged through interpreting the data.

### ***Self-Efficacy***

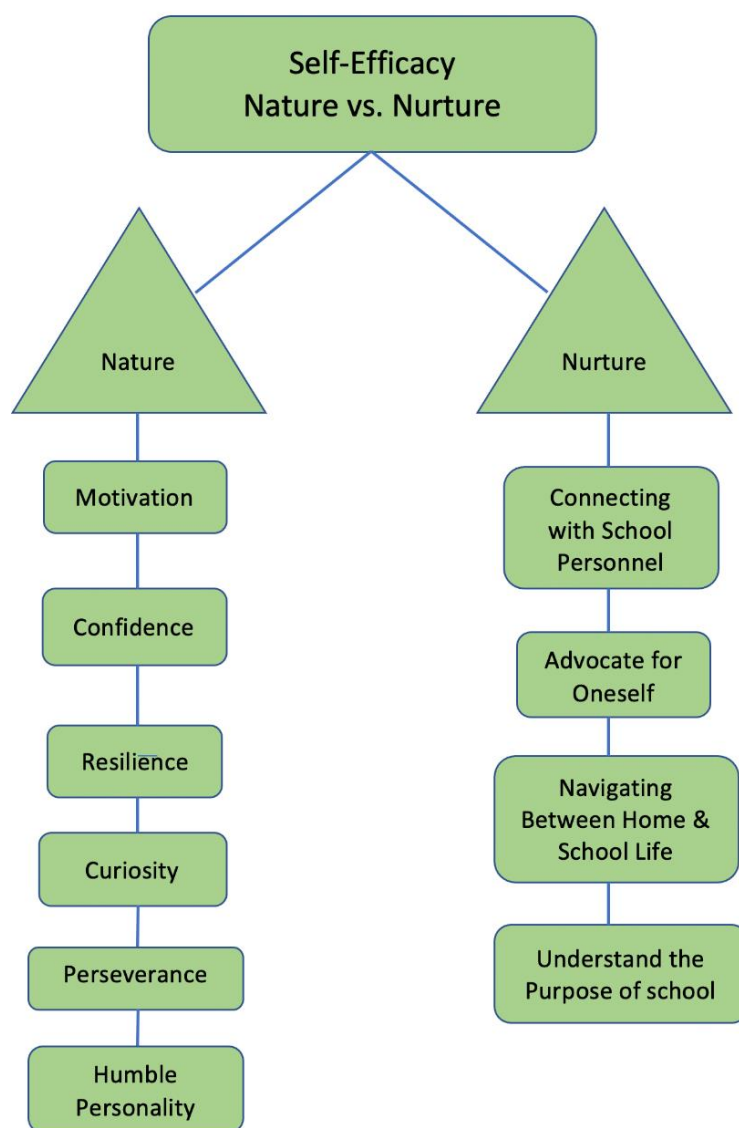
Although my participants never used the word self-efficacy, their words to describe successful Latino students included resilience, motivation, perseverance, and confidence. As I continued to analyze the raw data, I realized that my participants were describing characteristics of a positive sense of self. I grouped their examples into categories. These categories reminded me of someone who has agency—or, rather, self-efficacy.

The categories that emerged, such as advocating for oneself, curiosity, and confidence, led me to conclude that self-efficacy was the first emerging theme. Albert Bandura (1996) describes self-efficacy as having the ability to persevere, face difficulty, and have the resilience to adversity. Bandura explains that children's beliefs in their efficacy to regulate their own learning activities and master challenging subject matter affect their academic motivation, interests, and academic achievements. I also noted that as the teachers were describing self-efficacy, they were also assigning responsibility for



how self-efficacy could or should be encouraged. My interpretation of this major theme allowed me to extrapolate two subtheme, Nature vs. Nurture. Motivation, resilience, confidence, and perseverance are intrinsic characteristics therefore, I interpreted this finding as being derived from nature, something that students are born with. Some of the participants suggested that these characteristics should be learned at home and that parents need to play a greater role in their children's academic success. Perhaps if Latino students can learn these personality traits at home, this would account for the subtheme of nurture. In either situation, the overarching theme is self-efficacy. Below is a visual representation of the first major theme; Self-Efficacy, and the subthemes: Nature vs. Nurture.

Still, I questioned whether the words they used to describe successful Latino students are characteristics that come from within the student himself, nature, or something that they can learn in school or at home, nurture. This is a question that I cannot answer here. Still, it's important to note that whether the student intrinsically possesses self-efficacy or whether it can be learned, the majority of my participants' descriptions fell under this theme. Below is a visual representation of the first major theme of Self-Efficacy and the subthemes of Nature vs. Nurture.

**Figure 11***Self-Efficacy Nature vs. Nurture****Academic Achievements***

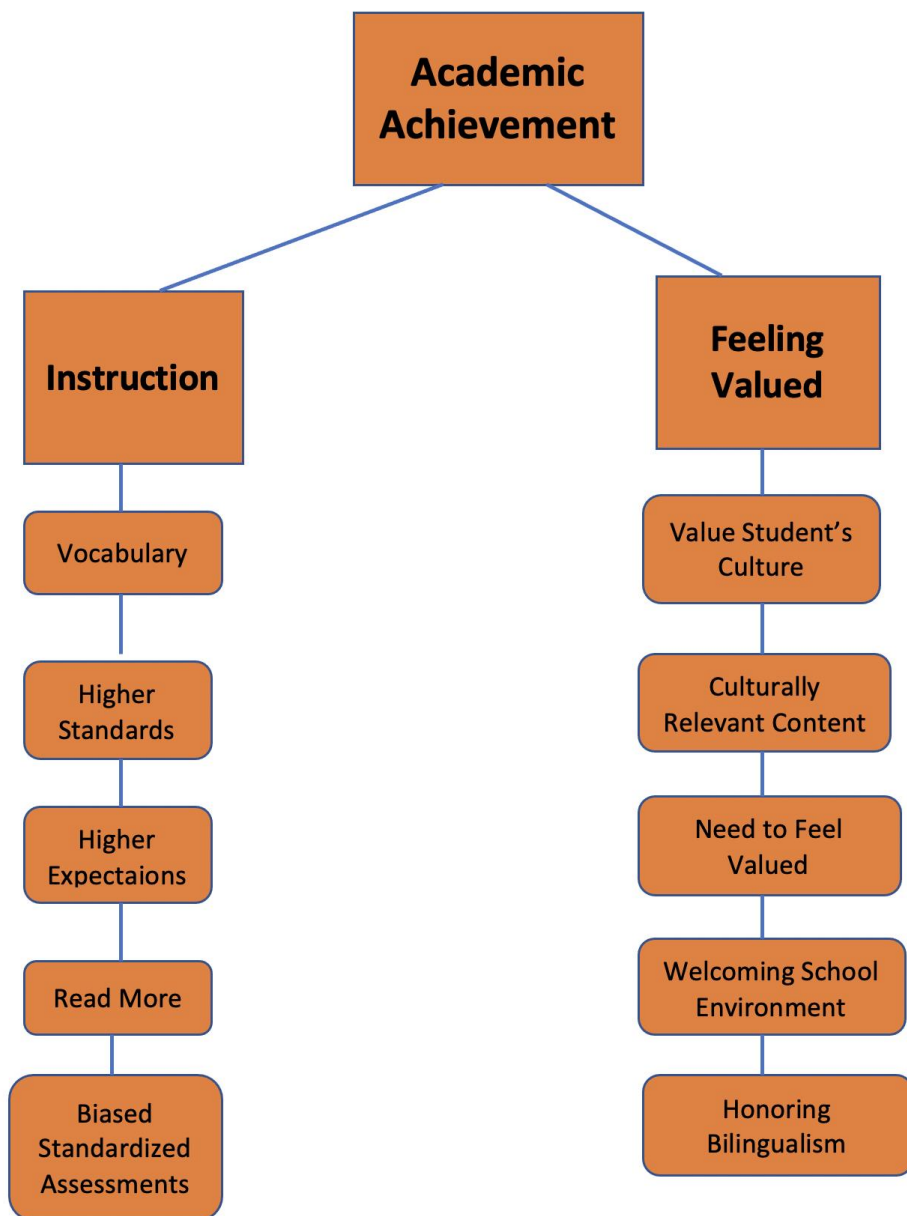
Next, I will describe the process which led me to the second theme of Academic Achievement. Teachers are naturally going to discuss academics as a way of reaching success in school, but the way in which they viewed the responsibility of achieving academic success varied. This distinction led me to identify two subthemes: Instructional and Feeling Valued. The subtheme of Instructional was drawn from such categories as

explicit vocabulary instruction, reading a wide variety of books, and holding students to higher standards. Teachers were describing what Latino students need to do in order to be academically successful. Yet, other participants stated that teachers and school districts need to honor bilingualism and provide a welcoming environment. I call this subtheme Feeling Valued. Since the overarching theme was academic achievement, it was clear to see that some participants placed the responsibility of reaching academic success on the student. In contrast, others placed this responsibility on the teachers and school districts.

As a teacher and a bilingual education director, I have used several academic strategies to help Latino students achieve academic success. In addition, I have also seen how important it is to let students know that they are valued and that their culture is valued. Figure 12 below represents the second theme of Academic Achievement and its two subthemes of Instructional and Feeling Valued.

**Figure 12**

*Academic Achievement: Instruction and Feeling Valued*



### *Student Support*

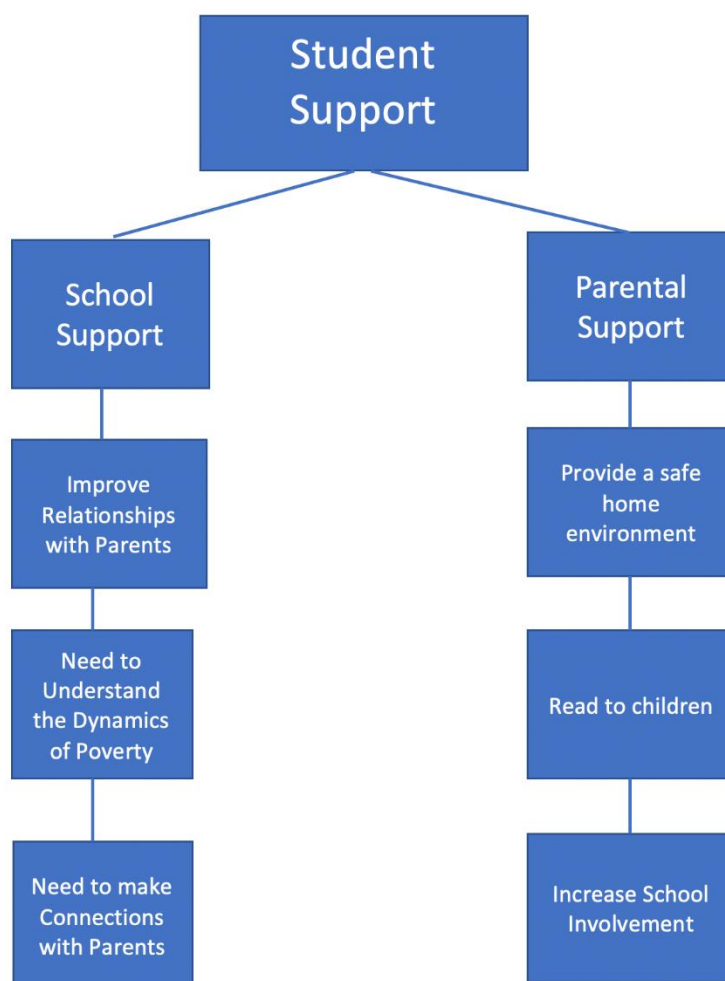
The third theme to emerge from the data was Student Support. This theme emerged from such categories as the importance of reading to children at home, connecting with students and parents, understanding the poverty the students and their parents' experience, and the meaning of providing a safe home environment.

After reading the raw data, it became clear that there was a distinct difference in providing academic support for Latino students. Although all participants felt that Latino students needed to feel supported, some thought it was the school's responsibility. In contrast, others placed this responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the parents/family. What helped me decide that Student Support needed to be broken down into two parts was because some participants felt that teachers needed to make better connections with parents and that they need to improve their relationships with them. I name this subtheme School Support because the responsibility was placed on school personnel. Moreover, some participants insisted that parents need to increase their involvement with the school, be responsible for reading to their children, and ensure that their home life is safe and secure. I call this subtheme Parental Support because the responsibility was placed on parents.

It is important to note that although my participants had varying views on supporting Latino students, they all agreed that Latino students need to feel supported. Figure 13 below presents a visual representation of the third theme, Student Support, and its two subthemes: School Support and Parental Support.

**Figure 13**

*Student Support: School Support and Parental Support*



### ***Negative Perceptions***

The fourth theme, Negative Perceptions, was derived from the categories that emerged from the data focused on biases. Although the participants never explicitly asserted that they hold biases toward Latino students, they did provide examples of expressions of prejudices that they have heard others verbalize in school settings and in the community. I took all the information about biases and divided it into two subthemes.

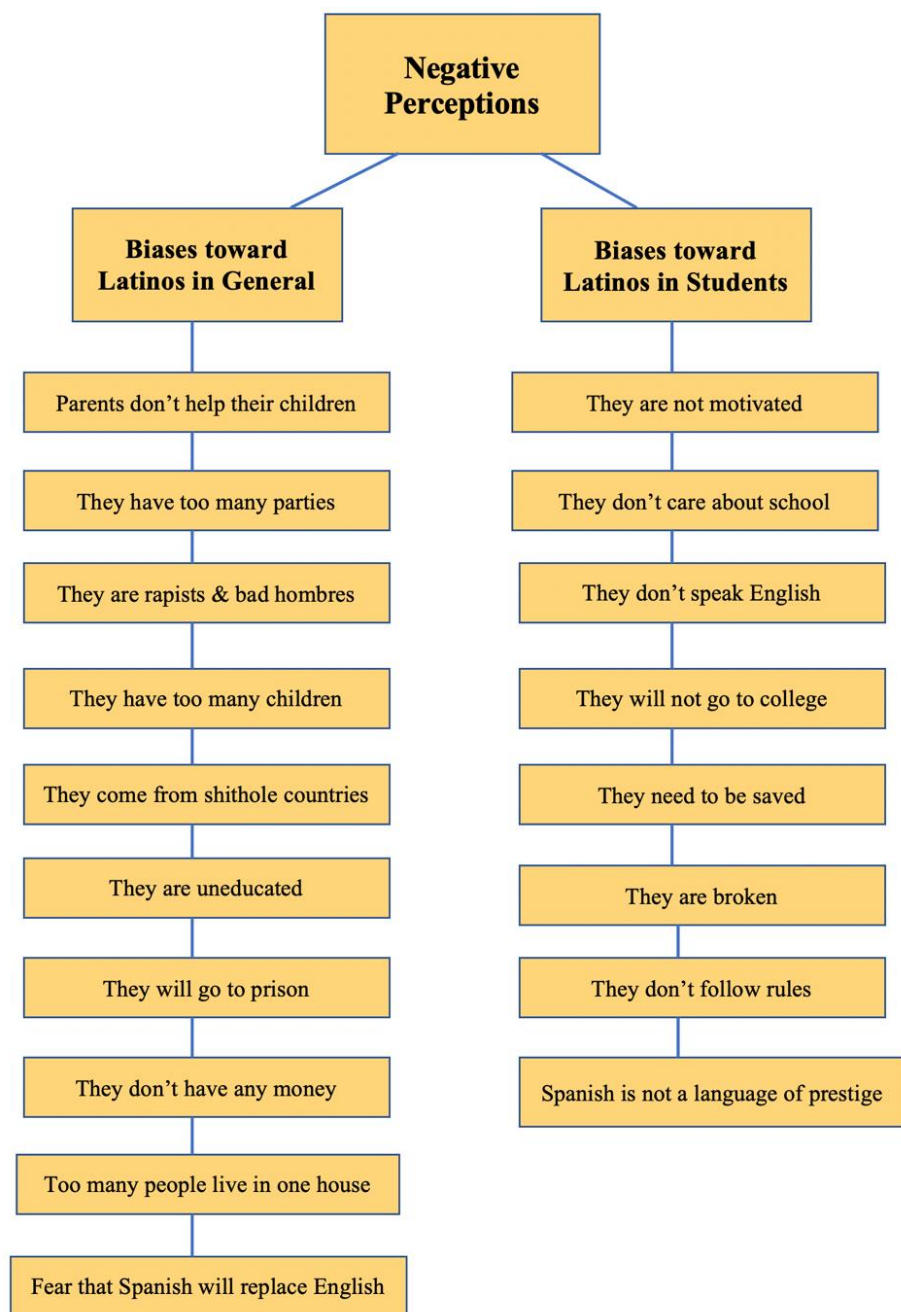
As I read comments like “Mexicans are rapists and bad hombres,” “they have too many children,” “they will go to prison,” and “they don’t have any money.” I was able to separate these comments from the ones they specifically made about Latino students. Some of the more striking comments made specifically about Latino students were, “they are not motivated,” “they don’t care about school,” “they don’t follow the rules,” and “they need to be saved.” Such comments allowed me to separate this theme into two subthemes.

The first subtheme pertains specifically to Latino students. I call this subtheme “Biases Toward Latino Students.” Examples of this subtheme include the bias that suggested that Latino students do not care about school, that they will not go to college, and that they do not know how to follow classroom rules. Examples of the second subtheme encompass prejudices that exist about Latino people in general, I call this subtheme “Biases Toward Latinos in General.” Examples of this subtheme include the idea that Latinos do not help their children with schoolwork, Latinos are generally uneducated, have too many children, and come from undesirable courtiers. Although the participants agreed that negative perceptions about Latinos continue to exist, they all declared that these negative perceptions need to change.

Figure 14 below is a visual representation of the fourth major theme, Negative Perceptions, and the subthemes: Biases Toward Latinos in General and Biases Toward Latino Students.

**Figure 14**

*Negative Perceptions: General Biases Towards Latinos and Specific Biases Toward Latino Students*



In summary, the four themes of Self-Efficacy, Academic Achievement, Student Support, and Negative Perceptions emerged from the data and presented the study's findings. These themes provided a deeper understanding of how the teachers who



participated in the study perceived their Latino students and how these students can achieve academic success in the teachers' eyes. The theme-seeking process and the visualization representation of the findings assisted me in reaching the answers to my research questions. In the following section, I triangulate the discovered data themes with the findings in the existing body of literature.

### **Triangulation of the Dissertation Findings with the Literature**

One way to promote the validity of research findings is to employ the technique of triangulation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). In the following section, I triangulate the participants' perspectives with current research about Latino student achievement within the framework of the four identified themes.

#### **Theme I: Self-Efficacy**

As my participants used words such as resilience, motivation, perseverance, and confidence when referring to academically successful Latino students, it became clear to me that they were actually describing self-efficacy. As mentioned above, Albert Bandura (1996) described self-efficacy as having the ability to persevere in the face of difficulty and resilience to adversity. Bandura also explained that “children’s beliefs in their efficacy to regulate their own learning activities and to master difficult subject matter affect their academic motivation, interests, and Academic achievements” (1996, p. 1206). The participants expressed their belief that Latino students need to advocate for themselves and understand the purpose of schooling in America.

But how do educators teach self-efficacy, perseverance, resilience, and motivation? One would think that these are intrinsic characteristics. Rivera et al. (2017) discussed the importance of building resilience in Latino students. Their research suggested that building resilience among Latino youth is crucial in developing such

characteristics as self-esteem and efficaciousness in subject matter. In order to achieve this goal, however, school districts need to promote resilience explicitly.

Bergeson and Heuschel (as cited in Rivera et al., 2017) identified four broad district-level characteristics that can improve Latino students' academic achievement by increasing their resilience. These topics include (a) effective school leadership; (b) quality teaching and learning; (c) support for system-wide improvement; and (d) clear and collaborative relationships (p. 179). In the dimension of quality teaching and learning, the researchers identified many of the same elements that my participants identified as positive attributes around resilience. These elements included having high academic expectations, building a strong relationship with families, and connecting academics to the student's life. Much like Linda suggested, "Teachers need to hold their students to high standards and not let them get away with mediocrity." Jose also talked about high expectations and asserted, "Having high expectations is probably the biggest issue. If you expect your students to perform, they will." Rivera et al. (2017) explained that teachers will turn high expectations for their students when school districts have expectations for their teachers. In addition, Gershenson et al. (2015) posited that teachers could have significantly lower expectations for the educational attainment of socioeconomically disadvantaged and racial minority students.

Continuing with the theme of Self-Efficacy, I also want to discuss the idea of making connections with school personnel. Bush (2012) emphasized the importance of offering socio-emotional support to Latino youth. Establishing socio-emotional support can be beneficial to student academic success. This goal can be accomplished by building strong relationships with teachers, academic councilors, or school psychologists. Barbara

also noted that strong relationships with school personnel could positively affect the academic outcome of Latino students. She stated,

If they have a strong connection with somebody that really values education then, I think they can be successful. Even if they're not the top of their class or anything else, if somebody in the building really cares about how they're doing then, they're excited to go show that person how well they are doing.

Dela also talked about the importance of making connections with students in order to make them feel comfortable at school.

***Subtheme: Nature vs. Nurture***

Now that I have established the connection between what my participants describe and what the research states regarding academically successful Latino students, I will describe how this overarching theme of self-efficacy can be divided into two subthemes: Nature vs. Nurture. When I look at the categories within the theme of self-efficacy, I realized that in some cases, the participants believed that successful Latino students already have resilience, motivation, curiosity, and perseverance naturally, hence the subtheme of nature. For example, Linda stated that “the kids who have motivation are the ones that do better.” Continuing with the theme subtheme of nature, Carol stated, “I think that Latino students who are more willing to take risks are going to go farther.” Again, I see this characteristic as being something that is produced from within one’s own being.

In contrast, Barbara felt that the family could model or teach reliance, motivation, and confidence when she stated that “if Latino students have a strong connection with somebody that really values education, then, I think they can be successful.” I interpret this subtheme as relating to nurture. When parents nurture these behaviors, their children

will become academically successful. For example, Latino students can learn how to advocate for themselves. Maria stated that “they need to understand that the purpose of school is to help them learn.” My interpretation of Maria’s statement is that she believes that as students recognize the purpose of schooling, they will learn to be self-reliant, which is part of self-efficacy. I was able to triangulate the notion of nurture with the research of Immordino-Yang et al. (2019), who suggested that

The brain’s malleability, the evolutionary plasticity that allows us to adapt to the demands of our environments and to learn, is triggered and organized largely via socially enabled, emotionally driven opportunities for cognitive development. High-quality social interaction, therefore, presents a critical opportunity and responsibility for education. (p. 185)

In conclusion, whether self-efficacy is inherent (nature) or learned (nurture), it is possible to assert that having opportunities for high-quality social interactions is critical to developing in children of all ages.

## **Theme II: Academic Achievements**

The teachers who participated in the study noted areas such as having higher expectations, explicit vocabulary instruction, and reading more books could improve Latino students' academic achievement. I also observed that many cited emotional issues such as feeling valued, understanding the Latino culture, and culturally relevant instruction as avenues to increase their academic success. These categories led to the overarching theme of Academic Achievements, which branched off into two subthemes: Instruction and Feeling Valued. Below, I triangulate the participants' perception with the literature, first regarding academic instruction and then with the second subtheme of feeling valued.

***Subtheme: Academic Instruction***

Because the participants of the current study were all teachers, it makes sense that they provided examples of academic strategies that they believe will increase the academic success of Latino students. I found that almost all participants thought that teachers should hold Latino students to higher expectations and not let them get away with mediocrity. For example, Jose said, “having high expectations is probably the biggest thing. If you expect your students to perform well, they will. You can’t go thinking that they can’t do something because then it will happen.” Linda also believes that teachers need to hold Latino students to higher expectations. She stated, “I think we need to hold them to a high standard and push them to get there.”

My interpretation of the teachers’ comments is that some teachers believe that Latino students are unable to reach higher standards and, therefore, their teachers push them. This follows the deficit thinking approach. Valencia (1997) examined one of the most widely known and historical theories, that of deficit thinking. He stated that

The deficit thinking model, at its core, is an endogenous theory, positing that the student who fails in school does so because of internal deficit or deficiencies.

Such deficits manifest, it is alleged, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior. (p. 2)

In addition, my other participant, Carole, noted the need for explicit vocabulary instruction. She stated that “Latino students need to learn everyday vocabulary before they can really make academic connections. The Latino students don’t have that, so, if they don’t have the everyday vocabulary, how can they build on their academic vocabulary?” My interpretation of the theme can be triangulated with the statement from Jones and Fuller (2003) that having high expectations involves knowing the students’

academic level. They added that teachers should set clear goals that have not been “watered down.”

***Subtheme: Feeling Valued***

Continuing under the theme of Academic Achievement, I also noted that the subtheme of Feeling Valued emerged. One of the findings of feeling valued pertains to valuing a student’s home language. Barbara said, “I think we need to make sure that bilingualism is emphasized and that people value it.” She talked about the fact that some people believe that French is viewed as a language of prestige and that Spanish is not. She believes that Americans should value people who speak two or more languages. The importance of feeling valued and feelings of belonging have been associated with greater academic achievement. Stevens et al. (2007) explained,

Not only does a sense of school belonging seem to influence other emotional and social behaviors that are indirectly related to learning, it may also influence cognitive goals that tend to be more directly linked to the use of learning strategies that, in turn, affect academic performance. (p. 58)

In his research on self-fulfilling prophecies and the educational outcomes of Latino/a students, Guyll et al. (2010) explored the relationship between Latino/a ethnic identity and academic performance. These scholars’ findings suggested that Latinos in the United States face a multitude of sociological and economic barriers in achieving academic success.

The tolerance of unabashed anti-Latino/a rhetoric in the public discourse, combined with the increasing size and visibility of Latino/as in the United States, is likely to provoke greater stereotyping, prejudice, stigmatization, and

discrimination against Latino/as, thereby setting the stage for these processes to occur. (Guyl et al., 2010, p. 114)

This research can be compared to the data from my research. For example, Barbara noted that “teachers who don’t know what the cultural background of their students is, should try to reach out to families and make connections so they will feel comfortable and safe in school.” Dela believes that “teachers need to be aware of cultural relevance and cultural competence.”

Teachers, in general, have not had a great deal of experience with culturally and linguistically diverse groups. Jones and Fuller (2003) cited that “most teachers come from White, middle-class backgrounds, and their knowledge and understanding of students who come from non-White or lower economic backgrounds tend to be limited (p. 24). This is precisely what my participants talked about. I believe that when teachers can understand the culture of their students, their students will feel valued. Authors like Gary Howard (2010) have specifically addressed how White teachers need to reflect on their own beliefs and dispositions held from positions of privilege in American society.

Continuing with the subtheme of Feeling Valued, I want to connect what my participants said about how making lessons culturally responsive to their culture will make Latino students feel valued in school to what Zaretta Hammond (2015) termed culturally responsive teaching. Hammond defined culturally responsive teaching as:

An educator’s ability to recognize students’ cultural displays of learning and meaning-making and respond positively and constructively with teaching moves that use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing.

All the while, the educator understands the importance of being in a relationship and having a social-emotional connection to the student in order to create a safe space for learning. (p. 15)

The current participant Della also suggested that teachers should incorporate the student's culture when creating lessons. She stated, "I think teachers need to be aware of cultural relevance, culture competency, understanding their home and making our assignments and our reading passages and our topics relevant to them and their lives." In conclusion, I was able to triangulate my findings, which led to the theme of Academics to the research that exists about Latino students' academic success.

### **Theme III: Student Support**

As I continued to analyze the data, I identified that many participants suggested that Latino students need to feel supported in school and at home in order to become academically successful. For example, several participants suggested that in order for Latino students to feel supported in school, their teachers need to have a better understanding of their home culture. My interpretations led me to identify the Student Support theme. In addition, I found that my participants identified two very different sets of adults that can provide support to Latino students. Some of my participants made suggestions about how teachers can support students and how parents can support the academic success of Latino students. My interpretation of these specific areas of distinction led me to identify two subtheme, School Support (i.e., what teachers can do), and Home Support (i.e., what parents can do).

#### ***Subtheme: School Support***

Most of the participants noted that teachers need to improve relationships and make connections with the parents of Latino students, even if language is a barrier. They



need to find solutions to this barrier. Linda stated that teachers need to find out more about families before assuming that the parent doesn't care. Linda went on to say that

When the teacher cannot communicate directly with the parent because of language barriers and the parent doesn't reach out to the teacher, they automatically assume that it's because they don't care. I've seen that assumption a lot, and it negatively impacts the student because then it just becomes this thing where you don't want to reach out. After all, they don't reach out.

One of the participants, Barbara, believes that schools should be more committed to inviting parents to classrooms and providing parents with various classes. Barbara wants to make sure that schools are trying to make families feel welcomed. She thinks that schools should have programs or classes for parents to get together, mingle, and learn together? She went on to say that,

If school can be a place where the parents feel comfortable, and they don't think every time the school is calling that it's a bad thing, then they will feel welcome and reach out for things that they need that might not even be school-related.

This can be triangulated with how Jones and Fuller (2003) described parental involvement. They note that Latino parents may perceive parental involvement differently than the school their children attend. In addition, they note that the schools must solicit the parents' perception of parental involvement and then share their own. Moreover, Ochoa (2007) noted that some teachers possess stereotyped perceptions of Latino families and narrow notions of parent participation in education. Teachers sometimes mistakenly equate parents' absences at school events with not caring. Further, Jones and Fuller (2003) suggested that to engage parents in the education of their

children, “teachers should learn the culture of their students, and language if possible, and their classroom must reflect this knowledge” (p. 97).

Continuing with the subtheme of School Support, the participant Jose discussed how teachers need to understand the dynamics of poverty. He shared an experience he witnessed between one of his students and the school principal’s assumption that this student had a bed at home, which the student did not; the student slept on the floor. The research reinforces Jose’s comments about misunderstandings between his student the principal. Here, Jones and Fuller stated,

Unlike middle-class peers, children living in poverty often experience discontinuity between what school expects of them and what they expect of the school. Studies focusing on the relationship between socioeconomic status and academics success, for example, note that conventional standards for success in school are based on middle-class expectations. (p. 102)

***Subtheme: Family Support***

Linda stated that Latino students would be more successful if their parents cared more about what happens in school and spent more time talking with their children.

Carole adds that Latino students need more family support and a strong family foundation. But unlike the others, who said that Latino families did not have a positive connection to the school, Maria sees the family as a fundamental asset to the success of Latino students. She explained,

I think that for Latinos, the family is so important to us. So, I think that that is a strength that Latinos bring, wanting to belong to something, right, wanting to feel a part of a family, that kindness they have, where they just want to make sure that everybody’s included. So, I would say that the family is a really great

strength.

The participants who felt that parents should be more involved in their children's academic success also believe that this can be accomplished by reading to them, providing a safe home environment, and increasing their involvement with the child's school. Some of the participants expressed deficit views of Latino parenting styles. Carole said, "Latino parents just don't communicate enough with their children when they are home." Some participants want the parents to play a more significant role in their children's lives pertaining to academic achievement. Carole also believes that a solid foundation at home is needed: "I think that if the family is invested in them, they will be invested in the school."

This type of deficit thinking can be triangulated with researchers such as Richard R. Valencia (1997). This author noted that proponents of deficit thinking alleged that the family unit was the transmitter of deficiencies. He added that the family unit, the mother, the father, and the home environment were pegged as the carriers of the deficit pathology. I believe that some teachers still hold these deficit views. This notion that Latino parents simply do not care about their students because they do not attend school events can be compared with Ochoa's (2007) criticism of Latino families' dominant conceptions, which "assume that parents who do not attend school events are not involved in their children's education" (p. 57) and that "some teachers possess stereotyped perceptions of Latino families and narrow notions of parental participation in educations" (p. 57). It is important to note that "working-class parents may not be able to attend school functions because of their work schedules or lack of transportation or childcare (Lareau, as cited in Ochoa, 2007).

Overall, the theme of Student Support suggests that when Latino students are supported, they will achieve academically. This theme touched on how schools can support Latino students and how parents can support them as well. I was able to triangulate my participants' ideas to research that discusses how teachers and parents can help the academic achievement of Latino students.

#### **Theme IV: Negative Perceptions**

Negative Perception is another theme that emerged from examining how the predetermined categories regarding biases toward Latinos in general and biases about Latino students specifically are related to each other. I was surprised by the candor with which some of the participants discussed their prejudices toward Latinos and specifically about Latino students. For example, I was surprised when Jose repeated what our former president, Donald Trump said about Latinos, that “they come from shit-hole countries and that they are all rapists.” I was not surprised, however, that the Latina teachers discussed negative biases that they had personally experienced. The Latina teachers provided real-life examples of biases that they had felt or witnessed. It seems that the White teachers had a much more difficult time expressing their prejudices about Latinos and therefore gave examples of what they have heard others may say about Latinos. For example, Carole said that she has heard other teachers say that schools should not offer bilingual education and that kids should only be taught English. Although Negative Perceptions were the overarching theme that emerged from the data, I saw that the participants gave examples of negative perceptions about Latino students and Latinos in general. This allowed me to delineate the theme into two subthemes: Biases about Latinos in General and Biases Specifically About Latino Students.

***Subtheme: Biases About Latinos in General Population***

Some of the participants were eager to share the biases that they have heard about Latinos. For example, Barbara cited our former president, Trump's anti-Latino rhetoric as a notable biased belief about Latinos. She stated, "I feel like as a whole, our culture in America, especially right now, especially with Trump in office, is just so disheartening because I feel like they don't care about them." She also shared biases that exist in her own family. One of her cousins stated that "It doesn't matter that Latino children are learning to read in English and Spanish because none of them are going to college, and half of them will probably be in jail anyway." She went on to say that "these types of disparaging comments are alive and well in our country, and society doesn't want to admit it, but it's pervasive."

Dela described all the things she read on Facebook about why Mexican families have such a high rate of COVID-19 cases. She read that the number of COVID cases are high because they are all "dirty Mexicans," they live together in overcrowded apartments, they and have parties all the time. Dela shared another story about something ignorant that a fellow teacher said about Latinos. She overheard a teacher complaining about a Latino parent. The=is teacher believed that her student's parents wouldn't help her with her homework or even check her homework. This teacher insisted that the parents should have a routine in place. She questioned why Latinos do not care enough to want to help their kids. Dela relayed to me that she was very frustrated with this teacher's comments about Latino parents.

One of the positive highlights from my data shows that some teachers understand that many biases about Latinos are false and that they need to work to eliminate them

from schools and society as a whole. Where do these biases against Latinos come from?

Guyll et al. (2010) suggested that

Current public and political debates surrounding the issues of immigration, employment, education, crime, terrorism, and border security often demonize individuals who happen to be Latino/a and, by implication, portray Latino/a as a group to be a threat to the United States. (p. 114)

Researchers like Laura Padilla (2004) have discussed the idea of internalized oppression. According to Padilla, this can happen when “someone experiences hurt that is not healed, distress themes emerge whereby the person engages in some type of harmful behavior” (Padilla, 2004, p. 15). Padilla further explained that “Latinos share a unique experience of oppression and survival in the United States” (2004, p.16). Padilla stated,

Mexican and Puerto Ricans, who constitute the largest and oldest Latino communities within the official borders of the United States, were attacked, invalidated, colonized, annexed, and exploited by the U.S. This oppressive behavior toward Latinos is deep-rooted. (2004, p. 16)

***Subtheme: Biases Specifically About Latino Students***

The participants shared a variety of examples of negative perceptions about Latino students. Dela shared a time when a few non-Spanish-speaking Latino students told her about a teacher who kept speaking Spanish to them, even after they informed her that they did not speak Spanish. The teacher told Dela, “It’s my classroom, and I can speak whatever language I want to speak. I can say hello however, I want to say it.”

Maria believes that some teachers who do not understand the Latino culture jump to inaccurate conclusions. She has heard teachers say, “They don’t know anything. They just sit there.” She feels that she has to explain to them that many Latino students have

been taught to be passive, which is cultural. It's not that there is no sign of their intelligence. It's just something that they've been taught in their culture."

Carole said that some teachers feel that when a student does not understand something the first time, the teacher's first instinct is to think, "They're never going to get it. Instead, they should take a step back and think and reflect on whether it's because they've never heard it or even known anything about it." Linda shared some of the biases that she has heard from her colleagues about Latino students. For example, these teachers say, "They don't do their homework because they don't have anywhere to do it, and they live with so many family members that they don't have a quiet place to do their homework."

Researchers like Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) have confirmed that teachers hold higher expectations for European American children than African American and Latino children. Similarly, Villenas and Deyhle (2018) found that negative perceptions of Latino students abound. They argued,

Teacher after a teacher reported that student failure was rooted in their culture and language. They blamed the parents for not caring and noted that their home lives were somehow unfit to provide what students need for school success. Locating the problem outside of the school context gave them comfort but little hope for any institutional critique of either their expectations, pedagogy, or the limited school curriculum. (Villenas & Deyhle, 2018, p. 429)

Researchers such as Farka (as cited in Stevens et al., 2007) have consistently documented that educators are more likely to view children from underrepresented groups as incapable of academic success.

Overall, the Negative Perceptions theme highlights the negative biases that exist about Latinos in general and those that specifically directed toward Latino students. This theme touched on prejudices that can negatively affect the academic achievement of Latino students. In conclusion, I was able to triangulate my findings, which led to the theme of Negative Perceptions to the research that exists about Latino students' academic success.

### **Study Findings**

After analyzing the teachers' interviews around predetermined categories focused on teachers' perceptions of their Latino students, I examined the relationships among the analyzed categories and patterns. I identified four major themes relevant to this research focus. I proceeded by triangulating the teachers' perspectives within the framework of these themes with the current literature. This rigorous process of analysis and interpretation allowed me to identify the following findings:

- Some teachers believe that successful Latino students have naturally within them the ability to be resilient, motivated, curious, and perseverant while, others think that parents are the ones who nurture these characteristics and behaviors.
- Utilizing culturally responsive teaching strategies will equip teachers to view their students from a non-White, middle-class perspective. Teachers believe that using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students will make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for Latino students.
- Teachers would benefit from a deeper understanding of Latino values, which includes cultural aspects such as social norms like courtesy, attitudes toward



- elders, the concept of time, rules about eye contact, and how to interpret certain behaviors, as well as understanding notions of group identity, problem-solving approaches, and decision-making.
- In this study, the Latino and White teachers revealed a different level of importance to cognitive and social-emotional skills. Overall, White teachers placed a higher value on cognitive intelligence, while Latino teachers placed a higher value on social intelligence.
  - The concept of building relationships and feeling valued was mentioned far more often by the Latino teachers than the White teachers.
  - The individualistic view of educational success is quite different from the collectivistic viewpoint of success. White teachers who generally fall into the individualistic perspective described successful students as being self-reliance and independent, while the Latino teachers who generally fall into the collectivistic perspective described successful students as being interdependent and prefer to work in cooperative groups.
  - Teachers who hold an individualistic viewpoint honor self-expression, while teachers who hold a collectivistic viewpoint, honor respect.
  - Most of the White teachers suggested that academic achievement can be reached by explicit vocabulary instruction, reading a wide variety of books, and holding students to higher standards. Yet, the Latino participants suggested that teachers and school districts should honor bilingualism and provide a welcoming environment for Latino students to reach academic achievement.
  - Some participants placed the responsibility of Latino students reaching academic

- success on teachers and parents. They suggested that teachers need to make better connections with parents; they need to improve their relationships with them.
- Some participants place academic success on parents. They insisted that parents need to increase their involvement with the school, be responsible for reading to their children, and ensure that their home life is safe and secure.
- Negative perceptions, prejudices, and biases toward Latino students still exist in schools today.
  - White and Latino teachers in the study had different perceptions on who is to be blamed for the failure of Latino students. When Latino students do not reach academic success, some of the White participants suggested that this is because the Latino parents are not involved in their children's schooling and that they do not read to their children. In contrast, the participating Latino teachers suggested that Latino students do not succeed in school because they do not feel valued and that their humble personalities do not fit the White teacher's perspective of an independent learner.
  - White teachers interpret quiet students as not caring or not wanting to participate; they expect students to ask for help and be more confident. The Latino teachers affirm that Latino children are taught to be humble and to never stand out, as this is a sign of humility. Latino children are taught the importance of not bring attention to themselves, as this would be viewed as rude.

### **Research Questions Answered**

When I began my dissertation, I wanted to learn about the attitudes that teachers have about Latino students. I remember how my teachers made me feel inferior when I

was a young student, and I was curious to explore whether today's Latino students are having the same experiences. Due to the focus on a limited number of participants, my purpose was not to prove anything, nor was it to produce definitive results (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Rather, my work presents a tentative interpretation based on rigorous examination of the points of view that participant teachers hold toward Latino students. Based on the themes that emerged, I was able to determine in-depth answers to my questions.

The first research question asks whether teachers' attitudes toward Latino students conforms to or resists a racialized understanding of student achievement. I found that the answer to this question depended on whether the teacher was Latino or White. I found that in many ways, race/ethnicity did play a role in some teachers' attitudes toward Latino students' academic achievement. But what I was not expecting was that the race of the teacher was going to be a factor. When I initially asked teachers to participate in my study, I was not expecting to find a racialized difference in the answers they gave. I was asking teachers to take part in the study without giving much thought to their ethnicity. When I began my research, I was not sure how my participants were going to answer. I was unsure whether they were going to bring up race and ethnicity at all. But what I did find is that although the Latino teachers did bring up the notion of race and ethnicity, the White teachers did not. Here again, I found that the perspective of the teacher, individualistic or collectivistic, did play a significant difference in how they view Latino students. I found that the White teachers, those who subscribe to the individualistic perspective, viewed Latino students in more tangible terms. They expected their Latino students to be more confident, resilient, and self-reliant, all of which are valued in an

individualistic-centered society. The Latino teachers, who came from collectivistic-centered homes, viewed their students from a collectivistic perspective. What they valued in students—like modesty, respect, and family success—stood in sharp contrast with how American schools view academic success.

I want to reiterate that neither view is better than the other; they are simply different. If we truly want all students to be academically successful, these differences need to be identified. I also want to point out that the dominant culture in the United States, which emphasizes individualism, holds the most power. When one group, such as White middle-class teachers, holds more social power than the non-dominant culture, it is not hard to conclude whose judgment will prevail. Moreover, I found that the manner in which teachers view their Latino students depends a great deal on whether they come from an individualistic or collectivist frame of reference. What one viewpoint sees as being a respectful student, the other views as lacking self-expression. What one views as modesty, the other views as lacking self-esteem.

The second research question was: How do teachers perceive their Latino students? This question provided me with insights into the different ways in which Latino teachers and White teachers view Latino students. Because I was only viewing my participants as teachers, I was not expecting to find that their answers to my questions were going to fall into ethnic categories. I found that the Latino teachers responded to my questions quite differently from how the White teachers responded to the same question. For example, when I asked my participants to tell me what they believe gets in the way of Latino students' academic success, the White teachers suggested that Latino parents are

not involved in their children's schooling, do not read to their children, and just do not care about their children's success.

In contrast, the Latino teachers suggested that Latino students do not succeed in school because they do not feel valued and that their humble personalities do not fit the White teacher's perspective of an independent learner. I was not expecting to see this at all, but now I can clearly understand why a difference in their viewpoint exists. I can see that Latino teachers have an advantage; in that they already understand the Latino culture. Therefore, they have a more in-depth understanding of the role that education plays in Latino households. Their perspectives help them understand the dynamics between Latino home life and school life, as well as the way in which Latino students behave in public. Rothstein-Fisch and Trumbull (2008) stated that the Latino culture is based on a collectivistic value system that shapes people's thoughts and actions in virtually all aspects of life.

In contrast, these researchers asserted that people in the United States place a higher value on individualism. I found that the difference between these two systems. Individualistic and collectivistic perspectives were revealed in the ways the Latino teachers and White teachers responded to my questions. The White teachers placed a higher value on cognitive intelligence, while the Latino teachers placed a higher value on social intelligence. The White teachers talked about self-reliance and independence, while the Latino teachers talked about interdependence and cooperation. The individualist view of educational success is quite different from the collectivist viewpoint of success. It is not a matter of valuing one or the other, but rather understanding that both ways of viewing academic success exist; teachers from an individualist viewpoint

honor self-expression, yet teachers from a collectivist viewpoint honor respect. Neither one is wrong; they are just different.

Another difference that I noted was in the way my participants answered the question of what Latino students can do to improve their academic success. The White teachers suggested that the students need to learn how to ask for help and increase their confidence. I believe they are asking Latino students to advocate for themselves, yet this notion is not always modeled in Latino homes. Based on my personal experience working with Latino parents, they almost always defer to the teacher as being the expert. As one of my participants beautifully explained, Latino children are taught to be humble and to never stand out, as this is a sign of humility. Children are taught the importance of not bring attention to themselves, as this would be viewed as rude. I believe that the White teachers sometimes interpret this behavior as not caring or not wanting to participate. Thus, White and Latino teachers have very different views on the same scenario. I found that the Latino teachers or those who specifically work with Latino students almost always discussed the importance of establishing relationships with their students. The concept of relationships and feeling valued was mentioned far more often by the Latino teachers than the White teachers. Latino teachers provided me with more abstract answers, whereas the White teachers had a more concrete answer to the question of how educators can ensure that Latino students find academic success. The White teachers spoke of explicit vocabulary instruction and reading more books. Still, the Latina teachers focused on the abstract notion of feeling valued in school, honoring their school culture, and welcoming their families to the school. They both want their Latino student to succeed academically, but their approach to achieving this is drastically different.

Overall, I found a difference in what teachers perceive as being academically successful, but this difference was based on the teachers' understanding of the Latino culture.

### **Validity and Trustworthiness of the Findings**

In this section, I demonstrate that the findings of my study are trustworthy and valid. Efron and Ravid (2020) state that reporting the analysis outcomes of qualitative research depends on rich, detailed descriptions. As I reported my findings, I provided thick and vivid descriptions of my participants' responses to my interview questions. I supplied an abounded number of quotations that captured the participants' authentic views and lived experiences in their voices. Efron and Ravid suggested that triangulation of the data obtained from multiple sources should also be utilized; I accomplished this by triangulating the different individual responses. As I quoted their words in my research, I compared and contrasted what some teachers said to other teachers' answers.

Additionally, I contextualized my findings within the research and theories discussed in current educational discourse. For example, when my participants Linda and Jose suggested that teachers need to hold their students to high standards and always have high expectations, I was able to triangulate this argument with research conducted by Gershenson et al. (2015). These researchers indicated that teachers could have significantly lower expectations for the educational potential of socioeconomically disadvantaged and racial minority students. I was also able to triangulate what the teachers had to say about the importance of building relationships with families to what other researchers had to say about this topic. Bush (2012) wrote about the importance of offering socio-emotional support to Latino youth and how establishing socio-emotional

support can be beneficial to student academic success. This can be accomplished by building strong relationships with teachers and families.

Finally, I was able to provide validity to my study by discussing my subjectivity. Through this study, I often shared my own biases. I was reflexive and acknowledged that my personal biases about the American educational system were based on the trauma that I experienced as a young child with teachers who I felt viewed me as less than capable because of my Mexican heritage. This acknowledgment led me to practice disciplined subjectivity to mitigate my personal biases from creeping in and influence my study (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Another aspect that strengthened the validity of my findings and answers to the research questions is that throughout the dissertation, I consistently provided detailed information on the processes and procedures involved in the study, such as the data collection, analysis, and interpretation strategies.

### **Limitations of this Study**

Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated that researchers must assert that traditional “gold standards” such as generalizability, replicability, control groups, and the like are not the right criteria to aim for in qualitative studies (p. 85). I understand that I am not making overarching claims, nor am I making generalizations about teachers’ perspectives about Latino students.

Another major limitation of my study was that although this study provided a great wealth of information, it was limited by the number of participants that were willing to be a part of this study during a worldwide pandemic. Before the COVID-19 crisis began, I had eight teachers that agreed to be in this study. After the pandemic hit,



however, only six of the original eight agreed to be interviewed. What this study provided was a look into six teachers' perceptions of Latino students.

I aimed to provide rich and rigorous data analyzed in methodological procedures, resulting in a coherent and holistic story of teachers' worldview about their Latino students. My study is also immersed in a broad theoretical discussion drawn from related literature on Latino students' academic success. Together, they demonstrate and validate the arguments and claims that are at the basis of my answers to the research questions.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on what I learned in my research dissertation, I would like to present some recommendations for future research on the topic of teachers' perceptions of Latino students. The first recommendation would be to further examine to what degree teachers hold implicit biases toward their Latino students. This research could be conducted with a more significant number of participants in states with a large number of Latino students. Additionally, it would be interesting to determine whether a difference exists between teachers in elementary school, middle school, and high school. Moreover, while researching teachers' perceptions of Latino students, researchers may want to expand the investigation into whether a difference exists between how White teachers, Black teachers, and Latino teachers view Latino students.

Also, more research is needed from the perspective of Latino students. This research may focus on the experiences of Latino students. Therefore, I would recommend future investigating teacher perceptions of Latino students, but this time the researcher would interview Latino students. Additionally, this type of research would identify how Latino students feel about the way teachers perceive them. Again, it would be interesting

to identify any differences between how Latino students think they are perceived from the perspective of White, Black, and Latino teachers.

### **Implications of this Study**

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) stated that researchers should ask themselves whether social policy implications can directly be derived from their study. They also ask, “are there particular voices or experiences that your study uncovered that are not frequently discussed in research or mainstream media?” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 343). In this section, I discuss two implications derived from my data that, hopefully, respond to Hesse-Biber and Leavy's challenges for (a) a more profound understanding of Latino culture and (b) culturally responsive teaching.

In the first implication, I discuss the importance of having a deeper understanding of Latino culture, values, and norms. As Rothstein-Fisch and Trumbull (2008) noted, schools in the United States tend to reflect the dominant culture's values, which have their roots in Western Europe. According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Latino students will increase by 17% by the year 2026. In contrast, the number of White students will decrease by 6% by 2026. The implication of this demographic change illustrates that teachers in American will be teaching more and more Latino students in the coming years. Are teachers equipped to view Latino students from a non-White, middle-class perspective, or will they continue to view them from a deficit perspective? I believe that teachers will benefit from a deeper understanding of the Latino culture because the number of Latino children in their classrooms will be increasing. Zaretta Hammond (2015) discussed the many aspects of culture that teachers should recognize in the classroom. These include social norms like courtesy, attitudes

toward elders, the concept of time, rules about eye contact, and how we interpret certain behaviors as disrespectful, offensive, or hostile. Hammond (2015) explained that a deeper understanding of culture is like the root system of a tree: “It is what grounds the individual and nourishes his mental health. It is the bedrock of self-concept, group identity, problem-solving approaches, and decision making” (p.24). I believe that it is imperative for school-districts to provide professional development opportunities for all teachers to deepen their understanding of Latino culture.

The second implication derived from this study has to do with culturally responsive pedagogy. Geneva Gay (2002) defined culturally responsive teaching “as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 31). She explained that “teachers must learn how to recognize, honor and incorporate the personal abilities of students into their teaching strategies.” In addition, she says that “if this is done, then school achievement will improve” (Gay, 2002, p. 1). From my experience as a teacher and as an administrator, I have experienced many situations in which teachers often do not have the autonomy to change the curriculum that the school board has approved and the administration has adopted. Teachers may want to incorporate culturally relevant teaching into their everyday lessons, but they may not be allowed to. Therefore, I believe that school districts bear the responsibility of (a) learning what culturally responsive teaching is and (b) understanding the value of implementing it and then provide opportunities for teachers to learn how to begin incorporating it into their lesson plans. Teel and Obidah (2008) stated,

Culturally responsive teaching is contingent upon seeing cultural differences as assets, creating caring learning communities where culturally different individuals and heritages are valued, using cultural knowledge of ethnically diverse cultures, families, and communities to guide curriculum development, classroom climates, instructional strategies, and relationships with students, challenging racial and cultural stereotypes, prejudices, racism, and other forms of intolerance, injustice, and oppression, being change agents for social justice and academic equity, mediating power imbalances in classrooms based on race, culture, ethnicity, and class, and accepting cultural responsiveness as endemic to educational effectiveness in all areas of learning for student from all ethnic groups. (p. 3)

Culturally relevant teaching discusses many of the notions that the participants of this study consider essential to the academic success of Latino students. But I believe that to incorporate culturally responsive teaching. Thus, school districts need to provide teachers with opportunities to utilize their tenants when creating lesson plans.

Overall, I feel that the school districts should encourage teachers to learn more about the Latino culture to have a deeper understanding of families and academic expectations. In addition, school administrators should learn about the culturally responsive curriculum and teaching strategies to provide teachers with culturally responsive training to increase Latino student academic success.

### **Personal Experience/Reflection**

This study proved to be a long and sometimes exhausting experience. My journey included a variety of obstacles. To begin with, I feel that working on my dissertation alone was one of the hardest things I have ever accomplished. I feel that if I had the

chance to do this again, I would try to be a part of a cohort to hold me accountable and keep me on track. Writing alone with only my dissertation chair's assistance was hard. Many times, I felt as though something was wrong with me when I did not understand a concept or needed further explanation. Like many other doctoral students, I was working full time while writing my dissertation. At the very beginning of my doctoral classes, I worked full-time as a fourth-grade bilingual teacher and taught as an adjunct graduate class, all while attending doctoral courses. It sounds crazy, but I love to learn, so it was rewarding even though this was hard to do.

Another obstacle that I had to overcome was that I raised alone three teenage boys when I began the doctoral program. Many times, their needs overruled my studies. Over these past 8 years, all three of my boys have graduated college, married, and one is in graduate school. I could not be prouder of them. I know that I have modeled dedication and perseverance for them, and they are better men for it.

Getting married a few years into the doctoral process was not an obstacle, but something that took me away from my research. Planning a wedding and all that comes with that definitely put a bump on the road to completing my dissertation. As they say, life happens, and my life has been enriched with a loving husband. While I was planning my wedding, I was also starting a new job. This new career move allowed me to gain experience as a school administrator, but it also took time away from my dissertation.

One positive realization about taking 8 years to complete my dissertation is the insights I gained as I transitioned from a bilingual teacher to a director of bilingual education in two different school districts. I know that I would not have had the same insights about the school district if I had finished my dissertation while I was still a

classroom teacher. I feel that I may not have had the confidence to ask the types of questions that I asked if I did not have administrator experience. Evaluating teachers, leading meetings, and providing professional development over the last 5 years gave me the confidence to interview my participants with self-assurance.

In addition, this study confirmed a lot of the ideas I had about how teachers view Latino students, and it revealed some ideas that I had not taken into consideration. By interviewing a mix of Latino teachers and White teachers, I was able to identify different ways in which they see their students. I was not surprised when a few of the participants gave concrete examples of Latino students' biases. I also wanted to see if the education of Latino students had changed since I was a little girl. In some ways, it has improved. For example, many teachers now have additional bilingual and ESL endorsements. Many teachers also speak Spanish and can help families of Latino students. Bilingual education is prominent in the surrounding suburbs of the midwestern city where I conducted my research. It is clear, however, that much of what I experienced as a young student is still prevalent. Teachers who believe in English-only classrooms still exist. Teachers who hold deficit beliefs about their Latino students still exist. Biases about Latinos in general still exist.

Another area that impacted my research and writing was political in nature. When I began the dissertation process, I did not think that politics would play a part in my research and data collection, but it did. When I was interviewing my participants, our country was under the anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, misogynistic, xenophobic spell of the 45th president of the United States of America, Donald Trump. Some of my participants addressed the fact that his anti-Mexican rhetoric had instilled fear in many of

their students. Never in my wildest nightmares could I believe that the president of the wealthiest, most powerful country in the world would cause kindergarten children to fear for their lives and add unnecessary stress to their lives and that of their families. So, it is with great joy and happiness that I am finishing my dissertation with a new, more inclusive president, Joe Biden. My hope is that moving forward, our country will be able to heal from the hateful words that came from the mouth of our forty-fifth president and begin to heal the damage he has caused the countless number of American citizens.

In conclusion, the greatest gift we can give our students is an education. We must ensure that we are providing the best possible education. In his first speech to a Joint Session of Congress in February 2009, President Obama stated, “In a global economy where the most valuable skills you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity, it is a prerequisite.” An educated society requires ensuring that everything possible is being done to eliminate stereotypes and bias towards Latino students.

### **Summary and Final Insights**

School districts continue to have conversations about closing the achievement gap between minority students and White students. School districts continue to supply teachers with new curricula and the latest assessment tools to keep track of student growth. All of this is done in order to achieve higher scores. There is a lack of focus, however, on teacher preparation or teacher professional development on culturally and linguistically diverse students. As a Director of Bilingual Education, I have tried to introduce multicultural training in the district where I have been employed. In both cases, I did not receive a positive response. Somehow, the powers that either refuse to see this

need or are unwilling to support these types of training financially. In either case, the ones who suffer from this neglect are the students. I believe that many teachers would be eager to learn more about working with Latino students and how to leverage their students' culture to create a more educated student body. In this study, I discussed the perceptions that teachers in a large metropolitan area of a Midwestern city have toward Latino students and their views on improving the academic success of Latino students.



## REFERENCES

- Abramson, L. (2006). The 'achievement gap' gets wider, despite changes. *National Public Radio*. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6493050>
- Baker, C. (2011). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism* (5th ed). Multilingual Matters.
- Bandura, A. (1996). Regulation of cognitive processes through perceived self-efficacy. In G. H. Jennings & D. Belanger (Eds.), *Passages beyond the gate: A Jungian approach to understanding the nature of American psychology at the dawn of the new millennium* (pp. 96-107). Simon & Schuster.
- Bateson, G. (2000). *Steps to an ecology of mind: Collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology*. University of Chicago Press.
- Bell, D. A., Jr. (1980). Comment: Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-convergence dilemma. *Harvard Law Review*.  
<https://harvardlawreview.org/1980/01/brown-v-board-of-education-and-the-interest-convergence-dilemma/>
- Bernal, D. D., & Aleman, E., Jr. (2017). *Transforming educational pathways for Chicana/o students: A critical race feminista praxis*. Teachers College Press.
- Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.). (1995). Introduction. In *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement* (pp. xiii–xxxii). New Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE.
- Delgado, R. (2014). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (2nd ed.). NYU Press.

- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (3rd ed.). New York University Press.
- Delgado Bernal, D. (2002) Critical race theory, LatCrit theory and critical raced-gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 105–126.
- Efrat, S., & Ravid, R. (2020). *Action research in education* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Fergus, E. (2017). The integration project among white teachers and racial/ethnic minority youth: Understanding bias in school practice. *Theory Into Practice*, 56(3), 169–177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2017.1336036>
- Findlaw. (2021, March 18). *Discrimination in education – federal laws*. <https://civilrights.findlaw.com/discrimination/discrimination-in-education-federal-laws.html>
- Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106–116. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487102053002003>
- Gershenson, S., Holt, S., & Papageorge, N. (2015). Who believes in me? The effect of student-teacher demographic match on teacher expectations. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2633993>
- Giroux, H. A. (1982). Culture and rationality in Frankfurt School Thought: Ideological foundations for a theory of social education. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 9(4), 17–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.1982.10506119>
- Gonzalez, G. G. (1990). *Chicano education in the era of segregation*. Balch Institute Press.

- Guyll, M., Madon, S., Prieto, L., & Scherr, K. C. (2010). The potential roles of self-fulfilling prophecies, stigma consciousness, and stereotype threat in linking Latino/a ethnicity and educational outcomes. *Journal of Social Issues*, 66(1), 113–130. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2009.01636.x>
- Hammond, D. (2015). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Corwin Press.
- Hawley, W. D., & Nieto, S. (2010). Another inconvenient truth: Race and ethnicity matter. *Educational Leadership*, 68(3), 66–71.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N., & Leavy, P. (2011). *The practice of qualitative research*. SAGE.
- Hill, N. E., & Torres, K. (2010). Negotiating the American Dream: The paradox of aspirations and achievement among Latino students and engagement between their families and schools. *Journal of Social Issues*, 66(1), 95–112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2009.01635.x>
- Howard, T. C. (2010). *Why race and culture matter in schools: Closing the achievement gap in America's classrooms*. Teachers College Press.
- Immordino-Yang, M. H., Darling-Hammond, L., & Krone, C. R. (2019). Nurturing nature: How brain development is inherently social and emotional, and what this means for education. *Educational Psychologist*, 54(3), 185–204. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2019.1633924>
- Jones, T. G., & Fuller, M. L. (2003). *Teaching Hispanic children*. Allyn and Bacon.
- Kim, J.-H. (2016). *Understanding narrative inquiry: The crafting and analysis of stories as research*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071802861>

- Kuhn, T. S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. University of Chicago Press.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory Into Practice*, 34(3), 159–165.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849509543675>
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (2016). *Designing qualitative research* (6th ed.). SAGE.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. SAGE.
- Menchaca, M. (1993). Chicano Indianism: A historical account of racial repression in the United States. *American Ethnologist*, 20(3), 583–603.  
<https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1993.20.3.02a00070>
- Mendez v. Westminster School District of Orange County, 64 F. Supp. 544, aff'd, 161 F.2d 774 (1946) (n.d.).
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *The human race*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/the%20human%20race>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Attitudes*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/attitudes#learn-more>.
- Moen, T. (2006). *Reflections on the narrative research approach*. SAGE.
- Murrell, C. P. (2007). *Race, culture and schooling: Identities of achievement in multicultural urban schools*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Nation's Report Card. (2019). <http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>
- Nieto, S., & Bode, P. (2008). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (5th ed.). Pearson.

- Ochoa, G. L. (2007). *Learning from Latino teachers*. Jossey-Bass.
- Omi, M., & Winant, H. (1994). Racial formation in the United States.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203076804>
- Padilla, L. M. (2004). Internalized oppression and Latinos/as. *Diversity Factor*, 12(3), 15-21.
- Paris, D., Alim, H. S., Genishi, C., & Alvermann, D. E. (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. Teachers College Press.
- Perez Huber, L. (2010). Using Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and racist nativism to explore intersectionality in the educational experiences of undocumented Chicana college students. *Educational Foundations*, 24(1-2), 77–96.
- Rivera, H. H., Garza, T., Huerta, M., Magdaleno, R., Rojas, E., & Torres-Morón, D. (2017). Fostering an environment for resilience among Latino youth: Characteristics of a successful college readiness program. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 18(2), 178–185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2017.1371605>
- Rossman, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2016). *An introduction to qualitative research: Learning in the field* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Rothstein-Fisch, C., & Trumbull, E. (2008). *How to build on students' cultural strengths*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Ryan, W. (1976). *Blaming the victim*. Vintage Books.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The SAGE dictionary of qualitative inquiry*. SAGE.

- Solórzano, D., & Delgado Bernal, D. (2001). Critical race theory, transformational resistance and social justice: Chicana and Chicano students in an urban context. *Urban Education, 36*, 308–342.
- Solórzano, D., & Yosso, T. (2001). Critical race and LatCrit theory and method: Counterstorytelling Chicana and Chicano graduate school experiences. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 14*(4), 471–495.
- Spring, J. H., & Spring, J. H. (2005). *The American school, 1642-2004*. McGraw-Hill.
- Stevens, T., Hamman, D., & Olivarez, A. (2007). Hispanic students' perception of White teachers' mastery goal orientation influences sense of school belonging. *Journal of Latinos and Education, 6*(1), 55–70.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15348430709336677>
- Tatum, B. (2007). “Why are all the Black kids still sitting together in the cafeteria?” and other conversations about race in the twenty-first century. *Liberal Education, 103*(3-4). <https://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/>
- Taylor, E., Gillborn, D., & Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *Foundations of critical race theory in education*. Routledge.
- Teel, K. M., & Obidah, J. (2008). *Building racial and cultural competence in the classroom: Strategies from urban educators*. Teachers College Press.
- Tenenbaum, H. R., & Ruck, M. D. (2007). Are teachers' expectations different for racial minority than for European American students? A meta-analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 99*(2), 253–273. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.99.2.253>
- Terman, L. M. (1916). *The measurement of intelligence*. Houghton Mifflin.

- Tozer, S. E., Senese, G., & Violas, P. C. (2013). *School and society: Historical and contemporary perspectives*. McGraw-Hill.
- Trucios-Haynes, E. (2000). Why “race matters”: LatCrit theory and Latino/a racial identity. *Berkeley La Raza Law Journal*, 11/12(2/1), 1.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade.2010.html>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2012). *Trends in academic progress: Reading 1971–2012 / Mathematics 1973–2012*.  
<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/main2012/pdf/2013456.pdf>
- Valencia, R. R. (1997). *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. Routledge Falmer.
- Villalpando, O. (2004). Practical considerations of critical race theory and Latino critical theory for Latino college students. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2004(105), 41–50. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.115>
- Villenas, S., & Deyhle, D. (2002). Critical race theory and ethnographies challenging the stereotypes: Latino families, schooling, resilience and resistance. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 29(4), 413–45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0362-6784.00140>
- Wellmer, A. (2014). On critical theory. *Social Research*, 81(3), 705–733.  
<https://doi.org/doi-org.nl.idm.oclc.org/10.1353/sor.2014.0045>